ANIMALS IN THE GLORIOUS QUR'AN

Relating Their Own Stories

قصص الحيوان فى القرآن

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Introduction

The Ever-Glorious Qur'an presents to us the stories of the Prophets and the friends of Allah. Within these stories we find a group of animals that have played a great and significant role in history.

- The crow that Allah sent to Adam's son in order to show him how to hide the dead body of his brother.
- The birds that Ibrahim (Abraham) had killed and divided upon the mountaintops and then Allah gave them life again.
- The cow of Banu Israel that Musa (Moses) ordered to be slaughtered in order to disclose the identity of a mysterious murderer.
- The wolf that was falsely accused of eating Yusuf (Joseph).
- The hoopoe of Sulayman (Solomon) that informed him about the Queen of Sheba.
- The termite that ate the staff of Sulayman on which he was leaning while he was sitting dead on his chair. After the termite had eaten through the wood, the Prophet fell down and his death became known.
- `Uzayr's donkey whom Allah put to death for a hundred years and then gave it life once again, right in front of his owner's eyes.

- The whale that swallowed Yunus (Jonah) for a while and then threw him out to the land because he was among those who praise Allah.
- The dog of the people of the cave that slept with them for three hundred and nine years.
- Sulayman's ant that had called the ants to escape to their dwellings, lest Sulayman and his hosts crush them, while they perceive not.
- Abrahah's elephant that was ordered to destroy the Ka'bah but was frozen in its place because of his fear of Allah and so he could not proceed.

This group of animals was mentioned in the Ever-Glorious Qur'an along with another group that included a bird, animal or plant but was actually a miracle of Allah. For example, Musa's staff that was turned into a snake. `Isa's clay that he had formed and breathed onto it, and it became a real bird by Allah's Permission. The flocks of birds that Allah (Exalted and Glorified be He) sent to the companions of the elephant to strike them with stones of baked clay.

The spider of the cave is also another creature that was not mentioned in the Ever-Glorious Qur'an but was mentioned in the purified *Sunnah*. It wove its web over the door of the cave in which Allah's Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companion Abu Bakr were hiding.

In these stories we come to know a group of beings from the animal kingdom that played their roles in life and appeared on the platform of events for a while before the curtain was finally let down. The Ever-Glorious Qur'an has only mentioned them or

flashed a certain instance of their life before us, while the details of their lives remain vague.

During my childhood, I loved this group of animals. I would read or listen to the stories of the Prophets but I was not able to absorb their deep meanings because of my young age. So, it was enough for me to think only about the animal that enjoyed the Prophet's company or served him.

Later on, as I got a little older, my love for animals took on a whole new horizon. Every stray dog on the road was a dog I wanted to feed, and pat its head. It may be a distant grandson of the dog of the people of the cave. Every skinny donkey in the rural areas was for me a beloved creature and friend. It may have been a distant relative of Uzayr's donkey that had experienced death and resurrection.

Moreover, throughout my teens I was looking for a hoopoe. Then, a friend of mine was able to catch one and he gave it to me as a present. I took the hoopoe home, set it loose in my room and looked at it. It was a desperate looking hoopoe and its loss of freedom put it to death on the second day after it refused to eat or drink. I remember the deep sense of sadness I felt when it died. I did not know what to do with him. So I brought out the Ever-Glorious Qur'an and started reading the story of Sulayman and the hoopoe to it. I remember that the hoopoe had lifted up its beautiful head once or twice while it was listening to the Qur'anic verses then it rested his head and surrendered its soul. At that time, I imagined that it had died content while listening to the glories of its distant grandfathers.

My love for animals caused me a lot of problems. Countless times I returned home carrying a small puppy or a stray cat to

my family. Then, a conflict would begin between them and I ... My family would usually refuse this new and strange guest. I tried uselessly to convince them that I would die if I gave it up.

I was a frequent visitor to the zoo. I would stand in front of the animals' cages, trying to break the barrier of silence that encompasses these creatures and try to understand what they wanted to say and what we fail to comprehend.

The writer of these lines has grown older. He has come to believe that truth is the greatest value in existence; and he has found it as a raw material in animals just like you find unpolished diamonds in the ground. When an animal looks at you, it looks at you with a frank, straight and steady look. A look void of illusion, lies and obscurity. Even if this animal that looks at you is a beast in the jungle, you will find that its eyes reveal a clear desire to devour you. It does not lie or deceive you. It is that pure truth, which is aligned to nature that we find in beasts, that has no place among human beings.

If an animal's savageness is sincere, then its pain is even more sincere and its tears are the most sincere. Sometimes a human cries as a part of a pre-conceived plan. However, when an animal cries, it is from true pain.

The writer of these lines grew older and older. My love for the animals that enjoyed the company of the Prophets became greater and greater. My body does not feel the essence of this love, as I cannot touch any of them. However, I managed to replace the body with the soul and I have read a lot about the behavior and habits of animals.

I stood in a state of consternation in front of the Glorious Qur'an that was revealed fourteen centuries ago, concealing

within its lines hints to these tales about animals that kept the company of Prophets and the friends of Allah. My amazement stemmed from the fact that no book has been written about this group of animals. "Why? What secret lies behind that indifference?" I asked myself. Such a question troubled me greatly, then I was guided to the secret. Is it because this group of animals was at the service of Allah's Prophets and friends?

In fact, I have written many books about the tales of the Prophets and the friends of Allah. However, it was not possible to pay attention to such weak creatures in the serious stories that discuss the salvation of man and the Hereafter.

Animals were considered too trivial to deserve any attention concerning their thinking, if they originally had any kind of thought or the ability to express their astonishment while they were living with Prophets, witnessing marvelous miracles or constituting an integral part of these miracles. In such a way, this group of animals was subject to the oppression of being ignored throughout fourteen centuries. We know that when the sun rises, the light of the stars sets. This is exactly what happened with this group of animals. They remain in their place, but their starlike light melted in the brilliant light of the Prophets (peace be upon them). For example, in the story of `Uzayr, who died by the Permission of Allah for one hundred years along with his donkey, and then Allah resurrected him and then his donkey before his eyes, we care for nothing but the Prophet `Uzayr. Who pays attention to the donkey except one of his own species?

Moreover, in the story of Yusuf (Joseph) (peace be upon him) whose brothers accused the wolf of devouring him, we are

moved by Ya`qub's sadness over his son. At the same time, who cares about the wolf's innocence or sadness except a wolf like him? This is also what we can find concerning the dog, the whale and the other animals that were in the company of the Prophets.

The experience of this group of animals has remained a silent secret looking for a tongue to express its stories, especially after the death of Sulayman and Dawud, who were able to talk to them and understand the language of birds and animals.

I think that I envy Sulayman and Dawud a great deal. I do not envy Sulayman for the gold that covered the walls of his castles, for I know that when Sulayman died, he did not take anything with him. For sure, like any human being, Sulayman was born naked, with nothing in his hands and died barehanded. Sulayman realized before anyone else that gold is nothing but a servant for human beings and so he made use of it. Sulayman gave more attention to the lilies of the fields that rose from the dust, than gold. I do not envy Sulayman for the subjugation of Jinn for him for I do not like to have all the Jinn of the earth under my command. I do not envy Sulayman for having Islam, for I have received Islam at the hands of the sun of the Prophets and the first and most perfect Muslim.

I envy Sulayman for one thing; his ability to understand birds and animals and to talk with them.

How amazing it is to sit and talk with a hoopoe, and to command it and witness its obedience; to have a discussion with a hoopoe; to smile at an ant warning the rest of its fellow creatures about man. This kind of ability makes one's mind and heart dizzy with wonder.

Anyway, although Sulayman and Dawud are dead, art will last until the end of time. Art can be the tongue by which we can describe the life of those animals that were in the company and service of the Prophets. There is no harm in obtaining help from science concerning the nature, habits and behavior of an animal. There is no objection to using one's imagination in regard to the animal's way of life, emotions and way of thinking, but in regard to the stories of the Prophets, art accepts them as they are and receives honor in being a servant calling for Allah.

We are told that the animal has certain instincts that lead it and it does not have a mind. We are told that the animal is a deaf creature that has no language.

Concerning the animal's language and its ability to understand, scientists are divided into two groups. The first group thinks that the animal is devoid of consciousness or a mind of any kind. This view is not new as it descended from Descartes who considered animals as no more than self-acting machines. However, the other group considers animals as being equipped with the same mental capacities as humans. This view is known as "Anthropomorphism." It is an old opinion that is older than Darwin's theory of evolution.

Many famous scientists were influenced by this school of Anthropomorphism. The famous German scientist Brehm, the author of the huge encyclopedia concerning the life of animals, said, "Mammals have a memory, intelligence and moods. Moreover, they have definite independent characters and can differentiate between different things and realize the differences in time, space, color and melody. They are able to recognize things and identify where danger lurks and they think about the

different ways to avoid it. They show love and hatred, anger and tenderness, cunning and skill, and faithfulness and treachery. They love those who are amicable and their children. They are able to express their thanks and their loyalty as well as their respect and their contempt. The skillful animal is able to prepare for every thing before doing it and the sensitive and chivalrous animal can risk its life and freedom voluntarily for the sake of the whole group." These were the words of a famous scientist, who dedicated his whole life to the study of animals.

It has been proven scientifically that animals have a language in spite of being different in their significance from that of humans. For example, it has been proven that each group of animals has its own way of communication. Sometimes they communicate by voice, touch, dancing, smell or by signs. What is important is that they have a way of communication. For sure, science has failed to decode this way but it has been proven that there is a language for animals that does not resemble ours. This is the conclusion of several studies that occupied the efforts of scientists and researchers. But the Glorious Qur'an has proven this fact fourteen centuries ago, at a time when animals were thought to be nothing but dirty, mindless, devoid of any logic or language and without any value except what could be obtained by man. In plain language, the Ever-Glorious Qur'an proves that animals have a language of their own and certain way of thinking. They contemplate one ant addressing other ants and warning them against Sulayman and his soldiers.

The ant did not know that Sulayman could understand its language or even hear it. The ant was able to suppose that Sulayman's army could destroy the ants without feeling that.

The ant used the word "feeling" which means that the ants know feelings.

Then consider the words of the hoopoe addressing Sulayman. The hoopoe said words to Sulayman that could not be uttered by the greatest philosophers on the earth. The hoopoe did not accept the prostration of the people of Sheba in worship of the sun. He mocked them in front of Sulayman and asked surprisingly, "*How could they refuse to prostrate themselves in worship to Allah Who brings to light what is hidden in the heavens and the earth!*"

What was proven by the Ever-Glorious Qur'an fourteen centuries ago while modern science is still trying to uncover some of it, is undoubtedly a miracle that bears witness to the fact that the Ever-Glorious Qur'an is a Divine Revelation.

It also proves the greatness of the first Muslims, as in their time people believed that animals could not speak, feel, understand or realize. In spite of the fact that the Ever-Glorious Qur'an came with the opposite of their beliefs, they believed without any reluctance. They believed without asking or looking for any proof.

I found myself inclined to write about the animals that kept the company of the Prophets. I decided to give this group of animals the chance to express their viewpoints in the form of a biography. I decided to borrow their minds, instincts, sorrows and dreams and to write their biography being guided by the light of the following words by Van Gogh who said, "When I draw a flower ... I become that flower."

It was a short time before Ramadan and I was asked to write something religious for Al-Ahram newspaper. Therefore, I decided to introduce this group of animals on the religious page. The task was not easy but it was interesting.

Maybe it was easy to play the role of a dog or a wolf but how I could be a hoopoe and how could I imagine myself as a huge whale like that white whale that swallowed Yunus.

In the beginning, I was bewildered, then Allah's Mercy inspired me so the most difficult task turned to be quite easy. Thus, I felt that the stones of the mountaintops were addressing me and telling me about the hoopoe that flew over them one day. Moreover, the echoes of the voice of the Dog of the cave came back taking the form of deep night thoughts and retold its story. A seashell thrown by the water of the sea told me that it had witnessed the glorious festival held by Yunus inside the dark belly of the whale.

I escaped from the atmosphere of Cairo to the house of my friend Mahmud Lotfy `Abd al-Wahhab in az-Zaqaziq where I spent my time reading and writing. For sure, it was necessary to relieve myself from my daily life in Cairo and to completely dedicate myself to writing.

I completely depended on the tales from the Ever-Glorious Qur'an as a reference in relation to the part concerned with the Prophets in these tales. I derived my information about the nature and habits of the animals from the Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom written by eight scientists from the Biology Museum of Washington University. After these two sources, I have given license to my imagination to dig deep and wide.

In spite of having a very long and difficult period of study and reading, the process of writing was very easy as ideas flooded my mind like a tremendous river. Moreover, it became apparent to me during the process of writing, that most of the animals that were in the company of the Prophets were symbols of Allah's Might and Mercy. The animal's body was a body and a symbol of something greater than itself.

Then, the month of Ramadan came while I was still writing. I started publishing in Al-Ahram newspaper, beginning with the tale of Yusuf's wolf. The tales were not completely published because of limited space.

So, I chose certain tales and published them after a daily process of summarizing that proved to be a cause of great frustration in the printing office. For example, I remember that they asked me to summarize the story about the dog of the people of the cave. So, at the end of the story I wrote, "I imagined that we were entering the door of the cave again ... to sleep really at this time. I imagined that Nahish was there in this dark corner. I am not going to talk about what hit us after that. Maybe I will be able to talk about this one day in another book. They said to me, 'Summarize!' I barked in anger. I want to relate ... but I must summarize."

Months passed, then Al-Mukhtar Al-Islamy magazine asked me to publish this collection of tales in a book, so I went back to my solitude to complete my tales.

The book was published twice and its tales were translated into French. Moreover, Mrs. Nafisa Al-Baqly prepared it for the European program in the Egyptian Broadcasting. These parts

were part of exchanged production with the French Broadcasting. These stories were broadcasted on French Radio.

All the time, I was thinking about the work that had not yet been finished, as at that time, I had not finished writing all the stories. I dreamed of completing and publishing them in a book with colored pictures. To my surprise, Mickey magazine found the book suitable for children so it decided to publish it with the colored drawings of the artist, Ihab Shakir.

Then the month of Ramadan came and I finished the book. Thus, the book was published in Ramadan throughout three years. I preferred to publish the last edition in Dar Ash-Shoruq after being convinced about this by my friend Ibrahim Al-Mu`allim.

I have a little confession for the reader ... My pleasure while writing this book was greater than my pleasure while reading it. And for your information, I have never read it after writing it but I have felt the noblest feeling that could be felt by a writer, during the time I was working on this book. Throughout the whole time, I felt that the pages of this group of animals were turned over a long time ago. However, I was quite sure that nothing could be lost; not a word, a feeling, a scene nor a situation. Everything keeps itself hidden in the heart and memory of this universe. All of this turned to be secrets and it is known that looking for secrets is so difficult, but I confess that my journey in searching for secrets was amusing, because I was writing easily as if there was somebody whispering to me all the secrets that he exerted great efforts in collecting them.

The reader may ask whether this is a book about religion, art or science. I think it is a work of art as it is imaginary, creative

and innovative. However, it also contains both religious and scientific elements.

The religious element is evident in the story of the Prophet whom the animal served. This part has been taken, as it was mentioned before, from the Ever-Glorious Qur'an. I made use of several interpretations of the Ever-Glorious Qur'an such as Ibn-Kathir, Al-Qurtubi and Al-Manar for the Glorious Qur'an as well as the stories of the Prophets. I was keen to stick to the original incidents of the story as mentioned in the most correct interpretations without any changes.

I made use of the scientific element that was derived from a scientific encyclopedia in regard to the nature and habits of the animals. Except for these two elements, I gave rein to my imagination without boundaries.

In a word, I mocked at man's oppression against the animal. I have invented names for this group of animals and imagined previous situations in this life before keeping the company and service of the Prophets. In this way, I was acting under the influence of art alone.

Ahmad Bahjat

The Sons of Adam and the Crow

﴾Then Allah sent a crow who scratched the ground to show him how to hide the dead body of his brother. He (the murderer) said, 'Woe to me! Am I not even able to be as this crow and to hide the dead body of my brother?' Then he became one of those who regretted.﴿

(Al-Ma'idah: 31)

Time changes everything. People's hair turns white as they grow older, but one thing always stays the same, the feathers of the crow that never change color. If anyone experienced what we, the crows, had experienced, his hair would never turn white.

As a creature I was the only eyewitness to the first crime of murder committed on the earth. I witnessed the first drop of human blood that was shed treacherously. I also knew that Allah was witnessing it all.

It was a very terrifying day. I knew that it was all due to Satan. How strange the actions of Satan are! How compliant human beings are to him! People love Allah; yet they disobey Him and while they hate Satan, they obey him. How strange the species called "humans" and how grave his contradictions are! How great Allah's mercy and forgiveness is to man! Excuse my language for I am a little bit angry.

When people experience hard times they have a saying that goes: "They were days blacker than the crow's feathers." I am aware that the crow's black color irritates people but they are oblivious to the fact that even the blackest feather on the crow's body is nothing compared to the human heart when it grows black because of sin.

I also know that people make fun of the way a crow walks, for he hops around when he walks like a mad person walking on firebrand. He is always on the move.

So, let us assume that we walk in a strange way - hopping and leaping about. Is that not considered natural after we have witnessed the injustice inflicted by a human being upon his brother?

Before the human being was created, we used to walk about with a swinging gait like that of kings. We were proud of our black color. Then, we witnessed a brother killing his brother and from that time onward our walk has become disturbed due to the horror of the act and our children inherited our handicap.

People regard the crow's voice as being extremely ugly. It only takes for one of our species to stand on a tree and caw, for people to become pessimistic, because our caw is regarded as an evil omen.

Our voice may not be as beautiful as a nightingale's but for sure it has nothing to do with evil omen. For evil omen is a word that coincides with the actions of human beings.

A human sometimes commits a terrible act but as soon as a crow caws at the top of a tree he forgets what he has done, remembers only the crow's voice and becomes pessimistic!

It is an old trick that the human being resorts to, as there is no other creature like him to compare with how he cheats and deceives himself.

Humankind accuses crows of theft, abduction, and disobedience to their parents and families. People say that we steal kohl from eyes and soap from the rooftops of houses. But the funny thing is that we do not even know what kohl is and we do not use soap when we take baths. We do not need it because our bodies and thoughts have reached such an extent of impurity that they cannot be cleansed.

I apologize for my harsh tone but if anyone had experienced what I have experienced, he would surely have lost his mind.

I was a judge in the world of crows and a witness in the world of people. However, once a judge loses his objectivity, calmness and becomes biased, he loses his honesty and fairness. I have played both these roles together. I was a judge in the world of crows; fair, calm and neutral but when I descended to testify in the world of humans, I lost my competence as a judge and my calmness and I screamed. Then Allah sent me to teach the son of Adam a lesson in mercy.

That day, long ago I said to Cain while I was cawing reproachfully in my sharp voice, "We know that you are a brutal murderer and in spite of that you are ignorant; in spite of the fact that you are a human being assumed to be knowledgeable. An ignorant person who is oblivious of being ignorant; an ignorant person who does not know how to bury his brother's body."

I apologize for I am still quite worked up.

Sometimes I think of what happened calmly and objectively like a judge. It is true that aggression is a characteristic of all creatures. Sometimes a crow is aggressive against the group and when that happens, a trial is assembled.

It is known that crows have courts that abide by the laws of justice. These trials take place when a certain crow steals another crows' nest, another crows' female or the food of young crows.

Each crime has its own penalty. When a crow steals another's nest we tear down the stolen nest, severely censure the violator and make him build another nest for that crow. In the case of stealing another crow's female, the group kills the crow in question with their beaks. When a crow steals the food of young crows, the group pulls out that crow's feathers until he becomes just like the young crows that are without feathers. Sometimes in addition to censure and pulling out feathers another penalty is added, which is banishment from the group.

In fact the trials of crows are usually held in an open space or in a wide field. Those who precede others in attendance have to wait for the rest of the group.

So, we wait for days and nights till our number is complete. Then, we appoint someone to guard the violator and the trial begins.

The whole group starts cawing together. The accused one caws back. In their turn, the witnesses caw and flap their wings in rage and anger.

The accused crow caws and flaps his wings in return.

Then finally, the accused lowers his wings, ducks his head and stops cawing. This is taken as his confession to the crime.

At this stage, the judge pronounces his sentence and all the crows flock upon the guilty one tearing him to death with their beaks. After that, the crows caw successively and fly away.

One of the them will then carry away the crow's dead body to be buried.

The dead crow may be guilty but death has a sanctity that obligates honoring the body by burying it.

In this way crows implement justice in two cases - life and death. This is because justice is the strongest instinct that crows have. Originally, justice in the world of humans is acquired and remains relative, but in the world of crows, it is instinctive and absolute.

There are some essential rules of ours that are not subject to change or substitution and whoever goes against them goes against the group and thus deserves to be despised and killed.

These rules and laws have not been established by crows. They have been bestowed upon us by Allah Who made them a part of our innate nature and a duty to be abided by. We do not constitute laws for ourselves.

We know that the soul is inclined to follow its desires and is partial to whatever is in its interest. Since crows have surrendered to the legislation of the Creator, they have reached the shore of safety. In fact, working in the field of law requires a person to separate himself from his desires, and no creature can do so except for the angels.

Mentioning angels reminds me of the first days of creation. The earth was so peaceful before the human being descended upon it.

No ship had exploited the pure sea, the wind was so pure as it had not touched the forehead of a human being and all the fields on this earth had never been trod on by humans. The life was still pure and not contaminated by even one single lie. Everything was pulsating with sincerity.

The mountains were covered with white snow that shone under the rays of the setting sun. The seas' blue chest heaved up and down as it sighed and the air was intoxicated from the perfume of green fields. Even though everything was exquisitely beautiful and enchanting, there was something missing from the scene ...

This missing element was that the human being should submit himself humbly to Allah and supplicate. Only then the real meaning behind this abstract beauty would surface. Things acquire less beauty and more meaning once they have knowledge, commit a mistake and then beg for mercy.

This is how it always has been with knowledge. Innocence is grazed in the beginning, and then knowledge is the result. Allah's angels are endowed with innocence. As for humans, their innocence was grazed in paradise. It was stolen by the devil for a certain eternal divine wisdom, which is, inhabiting and populating the earth. We knew that the human had come from paradise.

In the beginning it was tears, as Adam and Eve's crying on the earth was an extremely moving scene. We knew then from

the sound of those tears the enormity of guilt, the meaning of disobedience and the sincerity of repentance.

Adam aimed at nothing but to achieve repentance. How great was his dignified face! In his eyes, there was a limitless tenderness of a father that does not favor one child to another. As for Eve, she was the mother of all the women on this earth.

They both supplicated to Allah saying, "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers."

Eve bore her first child.

Humans do not lay eggs like us birds, but they bear children.

In each pregnancy Eve bore a boy and a girl at the same time. The boy of the first pregnancy could lawfully marry the girl of the second pregnancy and vice versa. Eve gave birth to Cain and his sister Aklima and Abel and his sister Liyotha and their siblings grew up together.

Abel came running down the hill laughing, his face clearly pronouncing all his eight years of age and in pursuit came Cain - holding in his hand a tree branch - trying to catch up with his brother. They were playing together as usual.

I do not know why one brother was as gentle as a field lily and the other as harsh as a mountain thorn. It always happened that Cain would choose to play the role of the hunter and give Abel the role of the prey. When the playing heated up Cain's eyes would shine with hate as he showered Abel with strokes from the tree branch in his hand.

In the beginning Abel would laugh, his laugh would vibrate between the hills and trees, like a book illuminated with purity and happiness. Then Cain would hold the tree branch harshly with his two hands instead of one, so the strokes would be more painful. At that point, pain instead of happiness would be drawn all over Abel's face and the sound of his laugh would turn into something like a scream.

Then Adam would come running to them and find Abel wounded and Cain would still be continuing his attack. Adam would scream saying, "Cain! What have you done to your brother?" Then Cain would reply, "We are playing and Abel has chosen to be the prey."

After that, Adam would scream, scolding Cain and then separate the two brothers. He would scold Cain and wipe the wounds of his kind son. He would talk to them telling them that they were brothers from the same mother, and that they lived on the same earth. For that reason they should join together in love, not hate. What surprised me was that Cain would shut his harsh mouth without defending himself, while on the other hand Abel would defend his brother begging his father to forgive them both.

Time passed and they turned twenty. At that time Cain raised his hand and slapped Abel's face and screamed, "This is my hut." He left red fingerprints on his brother's face. Abel was surprised by the insult. Anger swelled up inside him and fast tortured tears collected in his eyes.

Abel said innocently, "Look at my hands! They have become raw from building the hut."

Cain then replied with determination, "You will not spend the night in the hut after today's sunset. Cain has spoken his words."

After that Abel tenderly replied, "I too want to have my say in this. I love you Cain so why are you doing this?"

However, Cain heard nothing as he had left the place.

I did not see Abel telling Adam about what happened. I do not know why, maybe he felt that his father's heart was full of sadness from the things Cain had done and he was afraid that he would only deepen that sadness. Or he may have said to himself that Cain's threats were only words that would not be carried out. When the time of sunset arrived, Abel was surprised by his brother barging into his hut and in his hand there was a sharp edged rock. Before Abel could even open his mouth the rock cracked his forehead and blood came pouring out. Then Cain carried him and threw him out of the hut. Abel bandaged his wounds with herbs and went to sleep in his place. After that, Adam was surprised to find his son sleeping outside of his hut and that there was dry blood on his forehead. Adam screamed his usual scream, only this time it stemmed from a deeper sadness, "Cain! What have you done to your brother Abel?"

Cain did not look like Abel and neither did Aklima look like Lyotha. Cain was crueler than Abel and Lyotha was not as pretty as Aklima. Abel was supposed to marry Aklima and Cain was supposed to marry Lyotha. Personally, I favored Abel to his brother and I was content that he would be marrying the prettier of the two. Abel does not get angry when we eat from his food. One day Abel saw me standing in front of the chicken eggs he was raising, so he put out his hand and gave me an egg and I

was so happy for his cooperation with our kind. This man was aware of the wisdom behind cooperation between creatures and was aware of the meaning of mercy. He was a man who knows, loves and fears Allah.

I want to concentrate, so I can testify to all the destruction and ruin, and tell it to the wind that whistles in the most desolate places.

Cain screamed, "No, I am better than him!" The devil was behind his words. Satan said the same about Adam, and that day he taught it to Adam's son, so he could say it about his brother.

Cain again screamed in front of his father, "I will not marry Lyotha. I will marry Aklima! We were together in the same womb. I am more entitled to her!"

Adam explained to his son that it is unlawful to marry his sister. Cain refused to change his stance. I was surprised at his boldness and I did not know how Adam would react to this.

Then Adam said, "May each of you offer a sacrifice to Allah, and whoever's sacrifice is accepted is right."

Adam withdrew from trying to judge between them and left that to heaven.

I did not know how Allah would accept their sacrifices. I did not even know what was meant by sacrifice.

I waited for a few days in which I was busy solving problems in the world of the crows. At that time, there was a fugitive crow we were looking for to put to trial.

Then came the day of offering sacrifices to Allah. Abel came carrying one of his largest rams and he left it on the mountain

and prayed to Allah to accept it. Cain came and with him he brought ears of wheat that had not yet ripened. As Cain was stingy to the extent that we crows could not even taste his food, Cain offered his sacrifice and walked away.

The two brothers stood back.

In my heart, as I am an unbiased judge, I wished that Allah would accept Abel's sacrifice. Down came a fire from the sky that devoured Abel's sacrifice as a sign of acceptance. Abel shouted for joy and Cain screamed, "Murder!"

Cain stood with his palms extended in front of him gazing with his eyes into the horizon. Despite his silence, there was a wave of enmity vibrating from him that was almost tangible.

It was a wonderful day. The sun was spreading its warmth into the atmosphere and the pine trees that lined the horizon were bathing in the rays of the sun. Its branches took the color of amber that comes from the seas. From the nearby mountains blew a wind that carried with it from the depths of the coral reef that is covered with the forests green velvet, the perfume of the virgin forest and gorgeous flowers.

Then once again Cain screamed, "I will kill you."

Abel did not know why Cain was so angry with him. Indeed, purity usually does not know the motives of evil. Allah had accepted from one and refused the other.

Abel told his brother that Allah accepts only from the pious.

Again, Cain murmured, "I will kill you."

Abel replied, as he was turning around to go back to his hut, *"If you do stretch your hand against me to kill me, I shall never stretch*

my hand against you to kill you, for I fear Allah; the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn, and all that exists). Verily, I intend to let you draw my sin on yourself as well as yours, then you will be one of the dwellers of the Fire, and that is the recompense of the Zhalimun (polytheists and wrong doers)."

Abel walked away with his wife Aklima. They got married and when the signs of pregnancy started to appear on her, Cain decided to kill his brother.

We were able to find the guilty crow that had escaped and so his trial began.

Abel laid down on the ground after a day of hard work. He went to sleep as soon as he laid his head upon a bed of lilies. The sun made its way towards the west.

The trial of the sinning crow continued.

Sunset befell the sky and Cain came and in his hand was a donkey's jaw that he had found in the forest.

A donkey had died in the nearby forest and beasts of brey had eaten his meat and the vultures had eaten what was left of him and the earth had drunk his blood and only his bony jaw was left on the ground.

Cain carried the first weapon used on earth and started to look for his brother. He found him sleeping, so he moved towards him.

Something which I could not understand in the noble dreaming face moved him.

Abel then woke up and opened his eyes. Cain raised his hand and struck down with the bony jaw. Blood spluttered from

Abel's face onto Cain's chest. The sinning hand struck the kind face once again. On the fifth strike Cain's hand hit the mud of the field.

Abel laid completely motionless and Cain then realized that his brother had died. His hand ceased striking its fast and vicious strikes and he sat frowning in front of his victim.

We still have not finished with the trial of the sinning crow as we postponed the trial until the next day and appointed someone to guard the crow and then we left.

I stood at the top of a tree above Cain's head and cawed screaming, "Cain! What have you done to your brother Abel?"

Cain raised his head and looked at me. His body was trembling.

The trial of the accused crow took hours. He was lying. He denied the accusations ascribed to him, but as the trial advanced, the noose around his neck was tightening. All the time the trial was proceeding, Cain was walking and carrying his brother on his back.

He did not know what to do with his corpse. Vultures were circling above it and wild animals were lured by its smell. Cain was afraid that the wild animals would devour his brother if he left him, so he walked along carrying him on his back.

He did not know what to do with him or how to act.

The crow's trial was over and all the accusations ascribed to him were proven. The judges sentenced him to death. The sinning crow's sentence was executed. I carried the dead crow to bury him in a far away place. While I was flying, I felt an

unseen force guiding my wings towards Cain. I had no intention of passing by Cain, as I did not like him, but my wings, despite my will, were heading towards him. Something exalted that surpassed my perception was guiding my wings.

One of the honored angels ordered me, "O crow! Allah (Blessed and Exalted be He) is sending you to show the son of Adam how to bury his brother's body."

Upon that, I instantly landed with my burden in front of Cain. Then I put the dead crow in front of me and started digging in the ground. I dug the ground with my claws and beak. After that, I arranged the dead crow's wings against his body and pushed him with my beak into his grave. I screamed two short screams, and then covered him with sand.

After that, I looked at the son of Adam. My look clearly said this, "Even though we justifiably killed him we still owe his body the right to be respected. But you ... "

After that, I started cawing in his face and then finally I took flight towards the west.

As I was flying away, I heard Cain's scream, "O woe to me. I have failed to be like this crow and bury my brother's body."

I imagined that his scream was burning with remorse. I did not know from which spring his remorse flowed. Was he remorseful because he had been carrying him around all this time without knowing that he had to bury him? Or was he remorseful because he had unjustifiably killed him? I do not know. All I wanted to know was the condition of Abel's wife. I felt tranquility when I knew that she was about to give birth. I wanted to be reassured that the human race came from the

lineage of a strong generous man who feared Allah. I know that the children of Cain, the first murderer, would fill the earth. I know that the conflict between them and the children of the kind martyr Abel would never stop. Maybe even the father's tragedy would be repeated with the children.

All this I know but I am ignorant of the wisdom behind that. It is not my business to know. I was a witness to the son of Adam and a teacher to him for a period of time but it is not my job to know why.

Maybe the human knows.

Salih's Camel

﴾*And to Thamud (people, We sent) their brother Salih (Saleh). He said, 'O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Ilah (God) but Him. (La ilaha illa-Allah: none has the right to be worshipped but Allah). Indeed there has come to you a clear sign (the miracle of the coming out of a huge she camel from the midst of a rock) from your Lord. This she camel of Allah is a sign unto you; so you leave her to graze in Allah's earth, and touch her not with harm, lest a painful torment should seize you.'*﴿

(Al-A`raf: 73)

I am simply a camel, a pure bred camel perhaps but I know no evil. I am an example of pure innocence. I never harmed anyone before or after my birth. Despite all that I was unjustly slaughtered, even though Allah had warned whoever might do such a thing.

My slaughter is symbolic of the slaughter of every innocent being on this earth. Furthermore, my slaughter may have initiated the law that compelled good to present its blood to life's altar. Yes! My life was astonishing.

I was born from the bosom of a towering mountain by a word from Allah, the Most Merciful. As I was a part of the rocks, the only thing I knew was that I was a rock. The hard

pieces of rock transformed into soft meat. Blood flowed in the veins and that blood produced milk. My udder became filled with milk. I carried my newborn in my stomach and when he was born I started producing that blessed milk. I fed thousands of starving people with this blessed milk. Indeed, everyday I fed them and my newborn.

I did not know, who I was feeding. I fed them with no thought of anything in return, for I wanted nothing except that they thank Allah for this blessing. In spite of all that, I was killed. A knife was extended towards my neck one day. When I realized that I was dying, I looked for something to write with but could find nothing save my own blood. And I thus wrote my story with it. So if it does not end, it is not that I do not want to finish it. As I die, there is a kind smile marked upon my face. Does a camel smile? Surely, it smiles if it is both an image of an animal and a symbol of a miracle. Symbols never die. The look on such a face at the time of death, will be one of sure knowledge that it will awaken from the peaceful slumber of death. What a contrast to the tragedy of those who believe they will die and not to be resurrected. This was the tragedy of those who killed me.

I am known in history as Salih's camel and in the Glorious Qur'an I am known as Allah's camel. *"This she camel of Allah is a sign unto you."* Allah gave me this name to honor me and raise me in honor. In reality I was a camel, yet at the same time, I was not a camel. I may seem difficult to be understood but let me explain. My image was that of a camel but in essence I was one of the miracles of Allah. It is important to remember that everything in existence is both an image and a miracle.

Now where should I start? My birth was a surprise to me before it was a surprise to the people of Salih. As I realized my existence, I felt surprise. It was the surprise of finding oneself alive after having not existed.

I knew that I was special as I had the appearance of a camel but in reality I was much more than that. I knew that I was the symbol of innocence in a world that hates it. I was pure love facing pure hate.

My situation was extremely sensitive and complicated. I carried the characteristics of camels yet at the same time I bore the inner qualities that had nothing to do with animal nature. My essence encompassed a vast and wonderful world, which is the world of Allah's miracles. I realized after I was born that my birth itself was a miracle.

I was born among the Thamud people. They were people of strong lust and weak reason. Unfortunately their wealth only increased their tragedy because they were motivated by lust and they had the means to attain it.

They were idol worshipers. However, the society was not completely immersed in this dreadful sin. As there was he who would travel and meditate on the universe and come back believing in Allah, the All Powerful. But, the majority was swept away by the worship of personal interests, gold and all inner desires and appetites that know no limits. Then, Allah willed to send a Prophet to Thamud. He chose His Prophet from amongst them and he was a man most pure, righteous and a believer in one God. His name carried with it the inner qualities he bore.

Salih[1]... That was his name.

Salih (peace be upon him) said to his people, *"O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other Ilah (God) but Him."*

He repeated the same words that Hud, Nuh (Noah) and all of Allah's Prophets and Messengers said before him. Indeed, the words of the Prophets do not change. Worship may seem simple, instinctive, intuitive and real but in social reality it is considered a revolution. This is because to apply it means to abandon all the worshiped gods and all the interests that are related to those gods that live within the imagination of people. To give up these fanciful "gods", would mean completely rooting out the foundations of that society and reconstructing its values and conceptions; it would mean reconstructing its morals and customs; and it would mean demolishing the organizations that are pillared upon polytheism. All this means that there are interests that would completely fall apart, and those interests would then defend themselves by weapons, if necessary, in order to retain their power and strength.

The first weapon that Salih's people pointed at him was when they said, "Prove that you are a Prophet."

Before asking him to prove that he was a Prophet, they had said a strange thing to him ... as he warned them against worshiping the idols that their forefathers had worshiped and called them to the worship of Allah (The Creator) alone. They said to him, *"O Salih! You have been among us as a figure of good hope (and we wished for you to be our chief), till this [new thing which you have brought; that we leave our gods and worship your God (Allah) Alone]! Do you (now) forbid us the worship of what our*

1. Salih: In the Arabic language means one who is righteous and pious. (Trans.)

fathers have worshipped? But we are really in grave doubt as to that which you invite us to (monotheism)."

Their point of view seems to me to be an empty excuse. They said that they had expectations of him before he was made a Prophet. For, his knowledge was respected, his intellect was admired and whatever he said was completely believed. Furthermore, they were thinking of making him the leader or chief of their tribe and he had ruined everything with this new call ... the call to worship Allah alone.

They sank into deep thought, "What will they do with the gods of their grandfathers and the people before them? How will they be able to hide their shame in memorial to their fathers and grandfathers if they neglected worshiping their gods?" Think for a moment about this perverse logic that both my animal appearance and my illuminated inner-self refuse; this logic that if a sheep were to tell to a goat, it would bleat with great mirth. As long as Salih was respected and believed then his Prophethood should be respected and believed too. But what really happened was the contrary for after they had believed, Salih they started to be skeptical regarding him.

They said, *"We are really in grave doubt as to that which you invite us to (monotheism)."*

Salih shunned their perverse logic and asked them what they needed in order to believe that he was a Prophet of Allah.

At that they said, "Prove that you are a Prophet. You claim that you are sent by Allah and we doubt your claim. So why don't you present us with a sign that would prove your claim."

Salih asked his people with an open heart, "What would you like me to present?"

They answered, "Present a miracle that would prove your Prophethood."

He then asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Do not imagine that we are trying to disable or pressure you, but we want something extraordinary that has not happened before; we want a miracle from Allah to prove your Prophethood, we want something that has not occurred before."

Salih again asked, "What do you want."

They said, "Why doesn't that nearby mountain give birth to a camel? Why don't you ask Allah for that mountain to split in half and a camel to come out of it?"

And Salih asked, "If I do that, would you then believe that I am sent by Allah?"

They replied, "Yes, then and only then we would believe you."

Salih then debated with his people on the kind of miracle they were insisting on. He said to them, "You are asking for a physical and supernatural miracle. And, these types of miracles go against the laws of nature and it is not moral of human beings to ask Allah, the Almighty, to act against the laws of nature in order to believe in Him."

They shouted at him, "Confess your inability!"

He then said to them, "You are acting like children who want a dazzling toy that is not considered within the sphere of propriety in dealing with Allah."

They answered, "Salih, it is our right when you are here claiming to be sent by Allah that you present to us proof of your claim."

Salih said, "I fear that if I were to fulfill your request that you would eventually disbelieve in this miracle; I fear Allah's punishment that would befall you if you were to do so."

They said, "We will not. We promise you that we will believe in this miracle and that we will not inflict any harm upon it."

Salih said, "Do you promise me to do so?"

They answered, "We all promise you."

When Salih realized the extent to which they insisted on this miracle, he invoked Allah to fulfill their request, and so Allah fulfilled it."

And so, out from the mountain rocks there came a camel which was me.

That was how I was born ... by a Word from Allah - from the rocks of a mountain.

The people were very surprised when they saw their request had come true. The miracle shone forth right in front of their eyes and both dazzled them and made them submit.

They bowed their heads and confessed that Salih was sent by Allah and all promised to accept his call.

They all left me by myself.

Salih said to them, *"This she camel of Allah is a sign unto you; so you leave her to graze in Allah's earth, and touch her not with harm, lest a painful torment should seize you."*

Both Salih and the people went away and I was left alone. And, I started feeling desolate. As, I was neither a rock nor a camel; I had become a miracle guarded by the sword of Divine

Warning and to harm me would mean incurring punishment upon oneself.

Being a camel and a miracle at the same time, I could not comprehend how anyone would think of harming me.

I did not hate any single creature among them. On the contrary, I loved them all without exception. I walked a little while on the city's roads.

Their houses were made of rocks and stones; the rich had castles in the city's plains and they also had houses carved out in the mountains. I continued walking . . .

When the people woke up the day after the miracle had occurred, the first thing they did was making a circle around me. They examined me with utmost surprise.

Something in the way I moved invoked their fear. Every time I moved my head or tail, they would jump back shouting as if I had achieved something extraordinary just by moving!

That irritated me in the beginning and restricted my freedom.

So I decided to stay still in order not to bother them. After that, they increased their surveillance of me and eyes followed me wherever I went. The people would gather around me and speak in hushed tones I could not hear.

Then, a little boy dared to come near and put his hand on my neck.

He would extend his hand then quickly pull it back before it touched my neck.

I realized that he only wanted to pat my head so I bowed my head close to him and he patted it.

The boy's behavior overcame much of the people's fear of me so they began approaching me and started putting their hands on my body and touching me as if they wanted to be assured of the reality of my existence.

I welcomed the friendliness that was expressed by the Thamud people and my love for them increased.

Then, on the third day I had my baby and my newborn attracted the people's attention just as I had done, maybe even more. People would pat him and put their hands on him as if to prove to themselves that he was not an illusion. I started nursing my newborn and the Thamud people's mouth watered as they looked at the milk. They hurried over to their Prophet Salih and informed him that the camel had given birth and that milk was flowing from her udder.

They said to him, "We want to make use of the camel of Allah that for whose sake you invoked Him. For, her son will not drink all of her milk ... and this milk may be blessed."

Salih informed them that they were allowed the camel's milk by Allah's grace. However, he divided the water between me and them.

He said, "You shall leave the water for the camel to drink while you drink from her milk, and on the second day you drink the water and leave the milk for the camel to nurse her newborn with."

The people agreed to their Prophet's suggestion. In this way, my existence as an inexhaustible source of milk began. Allah (the Exalted) had blessed the milk that He had made flow from me to the extent that it covered all their needs and more. Indeed, they produced cheese, cream, and butter from it.

My milk was rich in taste and whoever drank from it became neither thirsty nor hungry.

Along with this. I was generous with them to the extent that I would pull my udder from the mouth of my little one in order to feed a little girl of the Thamud people whose name I did not even know.

Days passed by.

I was loved by the entire society because I both fed them and quenched their thirst.

However, it was a selfish love that disappears as soon as its source ceases to exist and has no assets in the stocks of love. I will not elaborate further on this.

I was loved by the pious poor that followed Salih, they called me Allah's camel whereas the leaders of the society called me Salih's camel. As time passed, I started to feel that I was surrounded and laid siege by a barbed wire of hate.

Then, a conversation between those who believed in Salih and his miracles and those who disbelieved in Allah took place.

> *"The leaders of those who were arrogant among his people said to those who were counted weak - to such of them as believed, 'Know you that Salih (Saleh) is one sent from his Lord.' They said, 'We indeed believe in that with which he has been sent.' Those who were arrogant said, 'Verily, we disbelieve in that which you believe in.'"*

This discussion resulted in two specific stances. The stance adopted by the believers and the stance adopted by the arrogant among them. In the beginning, the proud ones wanted to make

light of the issue, so they asked, "Do you know that Salih is sent by his God?"

The question was a trap, but, the believers' objectivity led them to the correct answer, which was, "We believe in what he was sent with."

The believers went beyond the supernatural miracle and beyond the incredible sign and made a halt at the teachings of the Prophet that are summarized in the worship of Allah alone.

The arrogant ones among them were not impressed by the answer as they saw a certain irritating calmness in it. They replied, "We disbelieve in that which you believe in."

Their reply carried with it scorn towards the believers and left a question concerning their character. They implied that the belief of the pious is the source of their skepticism and the secret of their disbelief.

The believers went away and the arrogant ones returned to their castles. Rage had filled their hearts and was threatening to explode in their actions.

The head of the arrogant persons sent an invitation to all the leaders of Thamud. They all entered a spacious hall in his castle. A historical conference then commenced.

All those who were present neither believed in Salih nor in me. They considered us both a conspiracy conniving to depose the ruling government.

Therefore, the leader said to the people, "The existence of a camel freely grazing about has stripped us of any authority we hold over the situation in the tribe."

Another retorted, "The existence of the camel is a continual reminder of Allah's sign and a never ending belief of Salih's prophethood."

They were thus confronted with the question, "What is the solution?"

The cruelest among them replied, "We must get rid of the camel."

And so a decision was made concerning me in the famous historical conference that was held by the Thamud people which was ... to slaughter me!

At first, those who were present were terrified by the idea of slaughtering me and argued that Salih had warned against harming the camel; and had warned against slaughtering it; and had promised that whosoever does such an act, a horrible punishment would descend after three days. They continued thinking of a way to get rid of me but were helpless at reaching a solution ...

Then, wine was poured amongst them and due to their intoxication they abandoned their fear and their leader said, "There is no other solution save slaughtering the camel. Its existence threatens the entire ruling government and that includes all heads of tribes, leaders and the rich that have personal interests. The entire society is threatened by this camel."

The people started debating this point of view while wine was being passed around and intoxication diminished any ounce of reason they possessed.

Hours after their conversation, the conference became a conspiracy and all those present joined in planning this crime. The next question was, "What do we do with the camel?" Then the question became, "How do we kill the camel?" Then it developed into, "Who will we select to kill the camel?"

Thus the conspiracy started weaving itself from the deepest depths of human malice. I was aware of everything. I did not hear what they were saying nor did I follow their words. Also I could not understand their fast and stern language but despite all that I was aware of everything.

Being a symbol of innocence I had a feeling that they were plotting and conniving to slaughter me. What surprised me most was that I did not know the reason for their discontent. What evil had I inflicted upon them that would give them the excuse to slaughter me? What harm?

There were no answers to these questions, so, I bowed my head and continued offering milk and tenderness.

I felt that the decision to slaughter me was pronounced and the only thing left was executing it.

One night while my son was lying next to me and soaking in the warmth of my body, I felt an immense sadness wash over me. The feeling of sadness arose from my lamenting the sad destiny of innocence. Why do people in this world slaughter innocence? My astonishment became greater and my understanding remained just as it was.

I continued offering milk and tenderness.

Two nights passed and on the third night I felt that it was going to be my last night among the Thamud people.

I had a strong feeling that my end was near. Everything was finalized because the public had made an agreement with nine of the worst criminals in the city and the people of the town had chosen the strongest and most ferocious from among them and entrusted him with the task of killing me.

I did not know the names of those nine men, but I knew that they and their children had drunk from my milk.

I never harmed anyone nor did I ever ask for any recompense.

Allah, the Almighty, mentions them in the Qur'anic verse, but without specifying their names *"And there were in the city nine men who made mischief in the land, and would not reform."*

They were the ones who planned the crime but the man who actually carried it out was referred to in the verse as "their comrade", *"Verily, We are sending the she-camel as a test for them. So watch them [O Salih (Saleh)], and be patient! And inform them that the water is to be shared between (her and) them. Each one's right to drink being established (by turns). But they called their comrade and he took (a sword) and killed (her). Then, how (terrible) was My Torment and My Warnings!"*

The one who was referred to as (their comrade) was swaying to and fro from intoxication when he entered upon the place where I slept. The sword in his hand was shining and his soul was blacker than the depth of night. Before he reached me, an angel had come and I understood from its tenderness towards me that I was going to die. I also understood thousands of other things. I understood that I was a trial to a proud people.

I stood up when the murderer entered. He looked at me but could scarcely see me from his drunkenness. He raised his sword and I rushed to protect my young one. He extended his sword to my foot and disconnected it from my body.

I fell prostrate on the ground.

Tremendous pain overcame me, I experienced then the cruelty of pain and felt pity towards whoever experienced the likes of it. Seeing the blood flowing from my foot frenzied the mind of the murderer and so he raised his sword and brought it down upon my neck.

What did I feel?

I felt comfort, sweetness and satisfaction. It was a wonderful feeling ... the moments of martyrdom are always great.

My young one and I once again became part of the mountains' rocks and the meaning of innocence remained forever slaughtered upon the earth. As for Salih's people they became a story that is briefly repeated in Allah's Book.

> *"Verily, We sent against them a single Saihah (torment - awful cry, etc.), and they became like the dry stubble of a fold-builder."*

Ibrahim's Birds

﴾And (remember) when Ibrahim (Abraham) said, 'My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.' He (Allah) said, 'Do you not believe?' He [Ibrahim] said, 'Yes (I believe), but to assure my heart.' He said, 'Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you (then slaughter them, cut them into pieces), and then put a portion of them on every hill, and call them, they will come to you in haste. And know that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.'﴿

(Al-Baqarah: 260)

On our way back home, we flew together in beautiful formations in the sky. Our home was not the green house that was built by Ibrahim, the friend of Allah. You know, a dove carries half of its home in its heart and the other half in the heart of the one it loves.

I was at the head of the flock, and I stretched out my wings, raised my beak high and went at top speed. The flock of doves followed me. I moved my wings and swayed this way and that. Air is pure bliss and it feels like I am swimming. Thanks be to Allah that He created me a bird.

I cannot imagine how those creatures that walk on the ground can endure their lives. For, in flight there are pleasures by the thousand that reveal themselves only to those who are able to soar.

Looking down from the air, the fields look radiantly green while on the ground they seem less so and the sand gets into your eyes and makes your eyes water.

When I saw her for the first time she was crying because the sand had gotten into her eyes. Praise be to Allah that He had created her for me. A white dove that named herself "Nasha." Before she fell in love, she had another name. It is true that doves change their names once they fall in love. This is because the old name is not sufficient to indicate the new being that is born after falling in love. We all know that after love a new being is born. We know all the secrets of love.

We love our Creator, Who brings us into existence from having been nothing. In fact, three fourths of our love we give to Allah.

In addition to this, we love the air that carries us as it carries a melody. So, half of the remaining fourth of our love is a gift to the air. We also love the human being so we feed him our meat regardless of the pain; half of the remaining fourth of our love is bestowed upon the human being.

Then, whatever remains of our love we give to females. What remains of our love to the females matches a grain of wheat in size. The human belittles the grain of wheat and throws it on the ground, forgetting that all the fields of golden wheat that feed millions were originally a single grain of wheat.

All the great love stories are of no value because its real value lies in the capacity to continue loving ... and our species loves until it dies.

When my mother became sick and died, something devastating, mysterious and terrifying besieged my father. When we were children, my father was always hopping about, joyfully and vigorously.

When they carried her away right in front of his eyes he ducked his head and said nothing.

The first day passed and he was silent. He did not fly, eat or drink. He opened his beak and closed it as if he was saying something. Then, on the second day, he laid down on his stomach, still in silence refusing to eat, drink, fly or open his beak. On the third day, he laid down on his side and sighed as if he was carrying a mountain on his chest. On the dawn of the fourth day he buried his beak into his wing and died. When they came to carry him away, his wing was wet as if he was crying even after he had died.

At that time we were too young to realize that love is an inherent element in the universe. The whole universe was built upon love, loyalty and peace.

One of the doves carried an olive branch to Nuh's ark after the flood had ceased flowing and surrendered to Allah's command. Henceforward, the dove became a symbol of profound peace, and all the people know that. However, what they do not know is that doves symbolize loyalty, love and resurrection.

The resurrection of the dead cannot be comprehended except by those who have experienced love, because love in itself is a resurrection from the cessation of habit, the weariness of intimacy and the absence of meaning. Whenever a creature's

heart starts pounding with love, it reawakens whatever had been dead in it.

But how can a creature believe in the reawakening of the heart and deny the resurrection of the body?

In love lies the moment in which Almighty Allah calls upon His servants and they rise from their long sleep within the ground. Exalted be Allah and Cherished be His Name.

I am still flying in space ... back to her ... to Nasha.

First I will dip my beak in the water that Ibrahim has put out for us. I lower my wings in reverence to Ibrahim, the owner of our house and the servant of Allah's Sacred House. He always travels to seek the Divine Truth (Allah). He is the friend of Allah. O ... how I love him.

It is impossible for creatures to get close to Ibrahim and not be affected, for it is he who first established the laws for the unity of love. He enlightens all the creatures around him. His enemies threw him into the fire but the earthly fire was put out by the heavenly one that is kindled in his heart.

Fire does not burn another fire that is greater than it. There is no fire greater than that of love.

Nasha ... My heart beats whenever I remember her.

She is white and slim. Her beak is ordinary and there is not a distinguishing feature in her body.

I am more handsome than her, as the male dove is usually more handsome than the female but this handsomeness of males is no more than a hidden weakness; for there is something irresistible in the slenderness of females.

There is not one creature that looks like another, and there is not one dove on the earth that looks like Nasha. She may be the least beautiful among doves and her walk may seem to project confidence but in reality, it hides such sweet softness. It is a kind of mysterious softness that is impossible to reveal.

Ah, I remember when I first met her! She was crying because the wind had blown some sand into her eyes so I spread out one of my wings to protect her from the sand and she gently greeted me by moving her tail feathers.

We did not converse. I raised my head in one fast motion, turning it around and I looked at her. I started moving my head and walking around her. I was circumambulating her, and as I did so I extended my wings and flew. I spun and spun around her and both my head and my heart were spinning with me while she stood her ground and looked at me.

Was I showing her my bravery, strength and gentleness at the same time? Was I flirting with her as some people think? Or was I talking to her through the language of silence that says more than what words can describe?

I do not know. Maybe I was doing all that and maybe I was just stumbling around her without realizing it.

I say I do not know. In fact in love 'I do not know' holds the upper hand because what a person in love usually understands is the picture he paints within himself for the one he loves, while Allah alone knows the truth.

We talked for a while. I imagined that the words flowing from her beak were a song sung by a nightingale or the praise of a curlew. Words took on a new meaning merely because they were coming from her.

Moreover, there stirred within me the old spring of peace that was carried by one of my forefathers when he returned carrying an olive branch in his beak.

All the snow on the mountaintops melted and clouds stooped towards the spring flowers, blowing soft kisses to them. Spring was born inside my heart.

Can this be love?

I asked her, "What is your name?"

"Nooshka," she replied.

I said, "That will soon become your old name."

"The wind is carrying your words far so I cannot hear you," was her reply.

I said nothing, but I circled around her, flapping my wings. I kept on flying high then suddenly soaring down. Around her I circumambulated with a tender heart and a compassionate soul. Around her I trembled, stumbled, circumambulated and span.

I made a clean breast of my love towards her, feeling that I had lost my old self and acquired a new one, thanks to love.

We met often in the yard of Ibrahim's house. It was the only house that used to scatter some grains for the doves and some food for the ants and its door was always held wide open for guests. When angels visited it, they were taken to be human guests and so the fattest calf was slaughtered.

We were four birds, who had taken refuge in his house - her, two others and myself.

Her original name, Nooshka, became Nasha. One day she said to me, "Tell me how you want me to be, so I can be just that."

I cushioned my beak on her neck and whispered, "I want none save you and I want you just the way you are."

She said, "But I am not beautiful. The other doves do not like me. They do not even feed me."

I answered, "I will feed you half of my heart."

She said, "And the other half ...?"

"You might become hungry again," I replied.

She moved her neck joyously.

We were together on the ground and I pointed with my beak to a grain of wheat but she said that she was not hungry. We were also together on a tree and I pointed to a fruit but she did not eat it. We flew and soared high in the sky ... the air was light and silky and there was a refreshing coldness that blew from the north. Our wings suddenly shivered.

She said, "Maybe the wind passed through some snow before it came here."

"The snow melt days ago," I told her.

"But I am shivering," she said, "do not ever leave me ..."

"Come! Let us play and warm the air," I suggested.

We flew, moved our wings and breathed into the air until it became warm again. We landed on a tree. The branch bent a little when we stood upon it. I bowed my head and looked carefully at the ground. I was thinking of how we shivered

together. Was pain lurking somewhere behind our love? Will one of us die before the other? Something cold gripped my heart.

She turned to me and whispered, "I want you beside me when I die."

"Life has not even begun yet," I told her.

She said, "Death did not sadden me before I met you."

The sun was on its way to set and the horizon seemed dyed with blood - the blood of doves. The idea of slaughter instantly came to my mind. "I do not want to be slaughtered now. I want to live a long life. O Lord, I have hardly even begun to love ..." I cried within.

I began to pray earnestly to Allah. She too prayed along with me. Then we retreated to our home.

She slept while I remained awake until sleepiness enveloped me. I was asleep when I saw myself flying between a white sky and a blue earth. I was flying at a tremendous height, greater even than the height an eagle flies.

All the time there was a white cloud under me. I saw Nasha sleeping on the cloud. I stared at her. She was not asleep and I was surprised to find that her feathers, wings and body were torn apart. Moreover, when I started to shout to her, the white cloud turned red. The cloud had drunk her blood and started to rain. It rained teardrops that were the size of red grapes. I wanted to scream, to cry, or to land.

I was surprised that the cloud had dissipated and I saw Nasha torn apart and divided upon the mountaintops. At the same time, I saw myself torn apart next to her on the mountaintops.

I was dreaming that I was flying and at the same time could see myself torn apart with her on the mountaintops. My left side joined to her right side. Each half of us completed the other.

I woke up terrified but found her breathing next to me - my beloved just as she was. She was safe. Her breath was moving the feathers on her neck.

I remained restless for a while but then sleep took hold of me.

Morning finally came. I woke up feeling spent after the strange dreams of the previous night. I flew a little so that I might refresh myself. I flew feeling oblivious to my surroundings and my mind was obsessed with only one image ... the image of Nasha and I together and torn apart on the mountains. I continued flying and hours passed. Suddenly I found myself extremely far from my country and home.

I realized that I was lost. I soared higher ... I flew high in space and flew in a circle trying to make out the boundaries of the area I had left. I could not make out anything for I was flying in a mountainous area. So, I soared higher and higher trying to use my sight but I could not recognize the landmarks I knew. When I gave up depending on my sight I tried to determine directions, by flying quietly and trying to connect the lines of magnetic power that extend between the earth's two poles.

When both my sight and the lines of magnetic power had let me down, I resorted to the sun to help me determine my direction. I wanted to make out the angle between the north and the sun. I realized at that time that if I could make out where the north was, I would be able to determine the other directions and head for the east.

I took time to examine the sun and at the moment I discovered the angle I wanted, I also realized that I was flying amidst mountains that eagles had taken as their homes.

I fell down due to absolute fear which I felt when I saw a large nest that had been abandoned by the mother and father who left behind a baby eagle. The baby eagle was one and half times bigger than me but could not fly yet. "He may have been born the day before yesterday," I thought. When he felt my movement in his nest, he raised his baldhead and sharp beak looking at me spitefully.

I told him but in a silent language, "Do not look at me in such a hostile way you little monster. It is not time to eat doves yet."

I had scarcely caught my breath when I threw myself into space and flew. I imagined that one thousand mature eagles were flying after me. I flew faster until I reached the outskirts of my land. I headed fast towards Ibrahim's house and I fell to the ground to catch my breath.

Nasha stood near my head. I said pantingly, "I have been saved from sure death."

"Calm down!" she said.

I calmed down. She flapped her wings and sent a refreshing breeze mixed with her body scent towards me. I was not tired anymore but felt thirsty. She realized what I wanted without me having to say it and so rushed over to the water dish. She filled her beak and returned to feed me water. Her beak touching my beak and her wing touching my wing. I was not thirsty for water anymore. I was thirsty for her.

I told her what I was feeling and she said, "Marry me."

I answered, "Yes, I take you in marriage."

"May heaven bless our marriage," she said.

"And may it be blessed by the greatest heart on the earth," I said.

"Ibrahim! The friend of Allah." she said.

"Let us both fly to him," I suggested.

We left the yard and headed to his house. We stood upon a low wall that he built to pray behind. We landed in front of his feet and kissed both of them. Our hearts trembled with love and he extended his generous hands and patted our heads.

My beloved shied away and so we flew. She shied away once again from me. We flew and celebrated our wedding in space. We invited the clouds and the stars that are hidden by the sunshine. We invited the sun and the moon that is hidden by its light. Also, we invited all of Allah's great creatures to the wedding party. It was the happiest moment in our lives.

In the beginning, we were four doves that lived in Ibrahim's house, then we became ten and then we became twenty. Love was expressing itself in a thousand ways and so the number of young was increasing.

We came to know a lot about the friend of Allah when we lived in his yard. He prayed a lot, preached a lot to people and meditated a great deal. Being mere birds, we could not comprehend the extent of his closeness to Allah, nor could we comprehend the deepness of his feelings for the Creator. All we knew was that he would seclude himself a lot. In one of his

moments of solitude, he was immersed in deep thought and he raised his hands to ask Allah,

> *"My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead." He (Allah) said, "Do you not believe?" He (Ibrahim) said, "Yes (I believe), but to be stronger in Faith." He said, "Take four birds, then cause them to incline towards you (then slaughter them, cut them into pieces), and then put a portion of them on every hill, and call them, they will come to you in haste. And know that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise."*

My wife was sleeping next to our young and I was sitting outside our nest when Prophet Ibrahim extended his hand out to me. I surrendered myself to the kind hand ...

There was a knife in his other hand. As the knife came closer to my neck I noticed the reflection of sun light on the silver blade. Thousands of candles were dancing on the blade. The more the blade closed in on my neck, the more I surrendered. My wife gave a short scream ... I did not feel anything. The blade of the knife sank into my neck.

The last thing I heard was her scream. Afterwards, I heard Ibrahim calling us to him. The next moment I found myself flying with three other birds towards Ibrahim and we threw ourselves into his arms. Ibrahim then prostrated to Allah.

I did not find Nasha in the nest. I found our young hungry and she was missing. I became extremely furious and decided to chastise her. I knew just where to find her. A place near the river where we used to meet a lot. I flew towards the river.

My wife stood motionless staring at the river. I stood on the branch next to her but she did not turn to me ... O, Lord what has come over her ... Could she be sick?

I said, "Nasha ... Why are you standing here alone?"

She did not turn to me. But two big tears fell from her eyes and she said, "I am losing my mind ... I can still hear his voice as if he were alive ... "

I was astonished by what she said and I raised my wing and struck her hard with it. She turned towards me.

As soon as she saw me she screamed in astonishment, "O Allah! How? But you are ..."

She started trembling and with all the strength she could muster, she said, "How did you come back from the dead my love? Ibrahim slaughtered you."

Then, she suddenly mentioned there being a knife. I wrapped my wing around her to calm her down and said, "Tell me everything."

"Ibrahim slaughtered you in front of me ... He tore you to pieces with three other birds and scattered your parts on the mountains."

I said, "Ibrahim did not slaughter me ... he summoned me to him so I came in haste."

She said, "No my love he slaughtered you right in front of my eyes."

"But I am alive," I assured her.

She said, "I cannot believe that you are alive ... O, my love!"

She collapsed in my wings and suddenly I realized what had happened.

Nasha told me that Ibrahim had slaughtered four birds and tore our bodies apart and put each part on a mountaintop and then returned to his house.

Nasha had accompanied him on his journey, and then stood crying over the half that was left of my body. Ibrahim left her and went away. She cried for a long while then flew to where I found her on a tree.

Hours passed and she was surprised to find me standing next to her. We talked for more than an hour. The emotions we were experiencing were great.

Nasha was trembling and said, "He slaughtered you in front of my eyes!"

I also trembled and answered, "No, he summoned me to him so I came in haste."

When both of us agreed that I had been slaughtered and then was brought back from the dead she asked, "How?"

"How" surfaced in the water in front of us as a bottomless hole.

Nasha then said, "Did not Ibrahim say, *'My Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.'* Ibrahim had left the mountain and left you slaughtered on top of it, then returned and summoned you and so you came to him."

"Why?" I asked her.

She said, "Maybe the friend of Allah wanted to see the creative hand at work. However, he could not reveal its secret but only touch the results."

O, Allah! But how? "How" emerged once again flowing on the water's surface.

"If the friend of Allah could not know how I returned from the dead then how am I to know?" I observed.

Once again I asked, "What is this power that can summon the dead and they answer its call?"

Nasha said, "It is the power of love. Have you forgotten that Ibrahim is the friend of Allah? Before, Ibrahim had almost slaughtered his most loved son for the sake of Allah. The one who has the ability to slaughter his son due to his love for Allah surely can summon a torn apart bird to come to him in one piece again. In both cases it is the power of love."

"I have become more confused. What is the wisdom behind this?" I asked.

Nasha said, "I have no answer dear! All I know my love, is that Allah reassured Ibrahim's heart when he was looking for reassurance ... and Allah reassured my heart by bringing you back to me after I had lost you. Allah has returned you to me, returned me to you and returned Ibrahim to himself ... What more can you want!"

I said, "How Allah loves Ibrahim!"

"How Allah loves me and you!" she added.

Prophet Yusuf and the Wolf

﴾He [Ya'qub] said, 'Truly, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear lest a wolf should devour him, while you are careless of him.' They said, 'If a wolf devours him, while we are 'Usbah (a strong group) (to guard him), then surely, we are the losers.'﴿

(Yusuf: 13-14)

Perhaps you do not know, but the life of a wolf is not an easy one. Just because we wolves have long, sharp fangs and deadly claws, does not mean that we always get what we want. That is just a part of being a wolf. All creatures have fangs and claws just like us. But in some cases their fangs and claws are hidden behind a sweet smile. Often, people take such a smile to heart and attack the fangs and claws as they are clear to the eye.

I am often a target for humans. You know, they often persecute me. They say bad things about me and my kind. Humans say that a wolf has no morals! And when they speak of the evil one from their own kind, they call him "A wolf!" This is an insult to us wolves. The human, who is called a "wolf" is often accused of having girl friends but the wolf is a stable and family minded creature. In fact, other species of animals envy our cozy family life and emotional stability.

I do not want to speak so much about myself. I am telling you these things because I feel really angry. I suffer because of the injustice of this world and I hate to find myself in a situation where I am being oppressive. But I also dislike to be in the situation where a human being uses his intelligence to oppress us wolves.

I am an oppressed wolf.

"Yusuf's wolf!" Yes, that is what they call me. This is the name that made me famous throughout history. But I swear that I did not see Prophet Yusuf even once in my life. I did not see him, eat him, rip his clothes or even come close to him. It was simply a tragedy from beginning to end.

Darkness fell over the desert. The yellow glow of the sand disappeared with the retreat of the sun and the earth became completely covered with a deep gray color. People were still while the desert's exciting nightlife came into motion. The creatures that looked for their food during the night started moving about. They were prowling, seeking and pouncing upon their prey.

I went out for a stroll in front of the entrance of the cave, where I live in. I filled my chest with the pure evening air. What pure delight it is to be a wolf and to stand in front of your cave and howl. It is impossible for the rest of the animal kingdom to forget the howling of the wolf once they have heard it.

A long and deep howl makes your back shiver and shoots through you like an ice-cold tremor. Between us wolves, we call howling "the evening song." We do not howl during the day, for our kingdom awakens at night and we sing when the darkness of our great kingdom comes alive.

We have six kinds of howls and each one has its own special meaning and its unique expression. The deep and long howl that begins at nightfall is the evening song, through which we glorify and exalt our Creator. The husky and short howl is an expression of loneliness and an invitation to the female of our kind. There is also the terrifying, long and angry, hunting howl. Moreover, there is a howl that means a priceless hunt has fallen into our hands. The best thing about our howling is that it spreads in the atmosphere, so the victim does not know how many wolves are heading towards it. Therefore, it is unable to realize the source of danger. If a horse, a mountain goat or a sheep hears our howling, it loses its ability to escape and becomes very nervous and so it becomes easy to pounce on it.

My gray body shoots through the desert like a flash of lightening and I strike. It takes one strike from the claws and then the stomach is warmed with hot food that is not yet completely dead. I once tried eating cooked food which was prepared by people using a fire and the food was left to cool down. I tried to eat it but found it rather tasteless. It stirred my surprise that the human being is satisfied with such soft food that has been spoiled by fire

Excuse me ... I talk about food because I am fasting. Five days ago, I ate half a fat sheep that went astray from the rest of its flock. We usually eat once a week and live on that for the rest of the week. We fast for six days without feeling hungry, and then we start looking for food again. I remained standing in front of the cave's entrance until nightfall, when the wolves' friend appeared. Who is this friend you might ask! Well, it is the moon. That pale silver circle that enables us to see even the smallest

mountain rodent. As soon as the moon appeared I raised my head and gave it the evening greeting. I howled a long howl. It is a pleasure to howl in the moonlight.

The moonlight is reflected on my fangs and then the beam of light is projected on the farthest of prey and captures it in its place. After that I pursue the beam.

As a wolf I can distinguish among more than forty scents at the same time. The scent of the ground is different from that of the grass, trees, mountain goats, flowers, sand, etc. I can distinguish the scent of sheep quite easily; as the sheep's main foolishness is that they cannot cover up their smell. They do not bathe properly so they spread a distinctive odor in the atmosphere. We wolves consider this smell an invitation card to tasty food.

I raised my head and smelled the air. I was able to distinguish the scent of sheep. My wife came out of the cave and was met with the same smell. Our eyes met and I said, "Let me go alone and you stay here with the young ones."

My lovely wife entered the cave and I quickly descended the hill. I was not out on a hunting mission because we do not go hunting except in groups that are not less than five and no more than twelve. I was out on a discovery mission. While I was running I raised my head and started pursuing the scent. I can pursue a scent at night as easily as a human being follows the course of a river during the day.

The scent was coming closer, so I slowed down and started moving cautiously. A few steps away, there was a white tent setup and in front of it sat ten men around a fire they had kindled

and a few steps away from them slept hundreds of sheep, goats and cows. It was really cold so I covered my mouth with my tail and watched.

The men were not equal in age. Among them there were those who grew their beard and those who grew their hair long. They were more likely to be either friends or brothers. After observing their faces, I felt that they were plotting something. I dropped low, remained camouflaged, raised my ears and listened.

One of the ten men while warming his hands on the fire said, "We have to get rid of Yusuf."

It became colder and an icy north wind started to blow and I shivered. I am not used to this cold, for I was born in Egypt where the weather is temperate. I grew up there with my brother, who is one year younger than me. I loved my brother very much. I did not go hunting unless we were together. However, one day he went out and never returned. I tried uselessly to look for him in Egypt. I searched for him in the farms and deserts but to no avail. His scent had completely vanished. After that, I was heartbroken and left Egypt, traveling through the desert to this cold country.

I found myself a stranger among other species of wolves, for their fur was a little bit longer than mine. I lived among them and married a spinster she-wolf. I imagine that she was found to be unattractive because of her short fur. In that way we were alike. I married her and she was tremendously happy to have me as her husband.

On our wedding day she said to me, "Where have you come from? Your fur is short and you do not look like the wolves in these parts."

I replied, "I have just come from Egypt looking for my younger brother who, went out and never returned."

With sincere tenderness, she said, "Do not be sad! I will be both your wife and your younger brother."

I was deeply moved by her words. I remembered my younger brother and howled a long sad howl. Then, the burdens of married life busied me and coated the memory of my absent brother temporarily with the dust of forgetfulness.

I married in spring and after two months and a half my wife gave birth to six little wolves. Before she gave birth, we had looked for a place for the coming family. With her help, I had dug a deep cave in the ground and then we stopped digging before finishing it and started looking again for another place. At last we found the cave in which we now live. It is a faraway cave that dominates the top of a rocky knoll in the middle of the desert. The kids grew up and their eye-color changed from being deep blue to a yellowish gray.

I realized that the kids had grown up and so I started teaching them to hunt. It seems that my wife made up for the deprived state she was living in before she had met me, by having lots of children. For as soon as she got pregnant, gave birth, nursed and taught them to hunt, she would get pregnant once again.

I became the head of a large family and had to provide for them. This responsibility tired me out and made me constantly

on the lookout for food. The smell of roasted meat made its way to my nose and along with it came the scent of a live little lamb that had not yet slept and was coughing from the cold.

The men sitting around the fire started talking again. They said, *"Truly, Yusuf and his brother (Benjamin) are loved more by our father than we, but we are 'Usbah (a strong group). Really, our father is in a plain error. Kill Yusuf or cast him out to some (other) land, so that the favor of your father may be given to you alone, and after that you will be righteous folk (by intending repentance before committing the sin)."*

I realized that a conspiracy was brewing to kill a human being whose name was repeated in the conversation. I was not interested in what they were saying as much as I was interested in knowing the place they were heading to the next day. I wanted to know where the little sheep was going.

One of them said, *"Kill not Yusuf, but if you must do something, throw him down to the bottom of a well, he will be picked up by some caravan of travelers."*

Their conversation still revolved around Yusuf. I became bored with their conversation and was surprised that they were so engrossed with Yusuf. I resumed listening to their conversation.

One of them said, "What will we say to our father Ya`qub when he asks us about our brother Yusuf?"

I confess that I was totally shocked when I discovered that Yusuf was none other than their younger brother. How could they plan to kill him? It is ironic that in spite of being a mere wolf, I have just left Egypt in search for my younger brother and still lives with a lamenting heart after losing him. The exciting

conversation caught my attention and I was surprised by the magnitude of spite that their discussion carried. Moreover, their conversation concerning their brother opened up my own wound, reminding me of my brother. I saw the devil sitting among them. They could not see him and so my disgust of them increased. I hated the smell of the little sheep and I hated even to eat from their flock and decided to leave.

As soon as I turned around to make my way back, the conversation once again attracted me and I remained listening for some time.

The conversation smelled so exciting like the smell of mountain goats and sheep.

One of them said, "Let us tell Ya`qub that we have lost Yusuf."

The second said, "But, how can we lose him while he is supposed to be with us ... Play your cards right."

The third said, "Let's say that a wolf has eaten him."

When I was mentioned in their conversation, I strained my ears to hear more.

Yusuf's kindred started conversing after coming to this evil idea and then they said, "A good idea! We will say that a wolf has eaten him while we were inattentive."

One of them said, "Ya`qub will not allow you to take Yusuf, the man loves him and cannot stand to be separated from him ..."

The others remarked, "We will try to convince our father. We will say that the young boy does not play enough and does not get enough sun, that is why his face is pale. So let us take him out, so he can run around and play."

The conversation once again started circulating around itself and intensified both my shock and surprise. The plotters were divided into two groups: Those who wanted to kill Yusuf and the other group, who suggested throwing him into a well. Despite the victory of the second group over the first, they unanimously agreed to direct the blame of the evil deed to a wolf ... any of the wolves ... Then they all started talking about this wolf; what they would say to their father about this wolf; how they would describe the state Yusuf was in after being eaten by the wolf; how they would convince their father that the wolf had really eaten him. One of them suggested taking Yusuf's shirt off and soiling it with the blood of a lamb that they would slaughter. Then they would carry the shirt to their father telling him that it was the shirt of his son which he was wearing when a wolf ate him.

I listened to their conversation and understood why this creature called "the human being" dominates the earth. Moreover, I realized why the number of wolves on this earth is decreasing, while as the number of people is increasing.

I understand that a wolf's claws and fangs are soft straw if compared to the civilized claws and fangs that are coated with human smiles.

Once again they started talking while they were eating. One of them said, "Suppose your father does not believe the story of the wolf." Their eldest replied, "We will hunt down a wolf and soil him and Yusuf's shirt with the same lamb's blood. Then, we will take the wolf to our father and tell him that this is the wicked wolf that has eaten Yusuf and this is his son's blood that is still clinging to the wolf's body and claws."

I trembled with rage. What kind of audacity does this human kind possess?

The little lamb started moving again amidst the sleeping flock. I totally lost my appetite for it and was only concerned with leaving the place in peace. A dog's scent closed in on me. A dog had left his place among the flock and came closer to them hoping that someone would throw him a piece of meat or a bone. Unlike us, dogs do not eat raw and warm meat. It seems that the dog had found my scent and so started to growl and his coat of hair stood on its end in an anticipation of attack.

I was not in the mood to fight and kill him, for their conversation tore me up inside and I despised even engaging myself in a fight with their dogs. I chose to get away from them all as fast as I could.

I got up from where I was and howled. I had hardly begun my desperate and angry howling and ended it, than I found myself at the other end of the desert. I ran like the wind trying to get away from a thousand human beings.

I entered the cave and my wife instantly awoke for she sleeps lightly.

She asked me in a hushed whisper, "Your face is ashen and you do not look normal to me."

I was panting heavily and said, "Damn."

She said, "Did you mistake the scent of sheep?"

"Damn," I repeated.

"I have never seen you angry like this before. What happened? Did someone try to hunt you down?"

"Something even worse has happened," I replied.

"I do not think that there is anything worse than you being hunted down," she remarked.

"But there is, so be quiet and let me think," I pleaded.

"Your youngest son asked for you and I told him that daddy has gone hunting."

My wife knows that I have a soft spot for my youngest son. She had hardly mentioned him when I decided to wake him up and play with him. I went to him and found him fast asleep on his back with his legs pointing upwards.

I pretended as if I was biting his stomach with my mouth so he woke up laughing and caught hold of my mouth with his four feet and also started to bite me. He rolled over to his side and I continued playing with him until his brothers woke up. I saw that I should play equally with all of them, so I started to tease and play with them until my wife produced a sound with her mouth that meant, "It is time to sleep."

I instantly left my little wolves. The wolves hugged each other and warmed themselves by huddling close together and surrendered themselves to sleep.

My wife quietly left the cave and stood at its entrance, so I realized that she wanted to talk to me privately, so I went out after her.

She gently asked me, "You have not talked to me about your journey."

By then my anger had subsided and I said to her, "It was a cursed journey. I wish that I had never gone out."

She was surprised and asked, "Why?"

I said, "I went out in search of prey but instead I found them searching for me."

She said, "For you!"

"Yes," I responded.

"Why were they looking for you?" she asked.

"Because I ate Yusuf," I replied.

"And who is Yusuf?" she asked, feeling confused.

I said, "A human that I have never even seen, well his brothers want to throw him into a well and accuse me of eating him."

She said, "You do not eat the flesh of human beings! How could they accuse you?"

I said, repeating to myself, "The tragedy lies in the fact that Yusuf is their brother ..."

"This is most strange!" commented my wife. "Unless I know you better I am going to say that you have eaten a nutmeg tree and so have lost your mind."

"I have not lost my mind, I am sad as I remembered my absent brother and my heart has been eaten out."

Silence prevailed for a while and then I found myself saying a piece of poetry:

The wolf howled and I found
Comfort from it in my plight
While as a human screamed
And I almost flew from fright.

"What is this?" asked my wife.

"This is poetry," I said simply.

"I did not know that you could recite poetry," she said.

"Despair is the source of my inspiration," I said sadly. "It is quite beyond one's endurance."

She said, "You have a lot of talents but little luck, my love."

"One day they will attribute what I have said to a human poet," I commented.

She said, "Praise be to Allah Who created us as wolves."

"Have the kids eaten?" I asked.

"They have eaten, so do not worry," she reassured me.

I bowed my head, remembering my brother and a wave of sadness seemed to drown me. Suddenly, my wife nuzzled my neck with her mouth ... She was kissing me.

She said with sincere tenderness, "I wish that I were lost instead of your brother."

I said, "My sadness is already deep, so do not aggravate it."

She said, "I wish that I were able to pay my life in ransom for your brother and to release you from a moment of sadness."

I said (kissing her), "Do not say that ..."

She interrupted me with another kiss. The moon ascended its throne in the sky. The world became devoid of sadness, pain and problems. We became unaware of everything in this universe except each other. I buried my sorrow in her and the night passed by. After that I resumed my normal life.

The family would sleep during most of the day and wake up late in the afternoon. My wife would nurse our kids as long as they were little and when they grew up a little she would feed them meat partially digested in her stomach. When they were a little older still they would go out on hunting trips to learn the secrets and ways of the wolves. When they are fully-grown up they would set out in new hunting groups and then each one of them would establish a family and have kids. After that the families would all gather together and go hunting.

The time for us to go hunting had arrived.

We agreed to meet at the entrance of my cave. The delegations of wolves started arriving. We greeted each other by wagging our tails and raising them high. We were ten adult wolves and two young ones. It was their first time to go out.

I kept an eye on the two little wolves. They were extremely excited. They were moving in every direction dancing and running around here and there. I looked at them and remembered my childhood in Egypt. I used to play like that with my younger brother in the mountains and deserts there.

Not every moment of a wolf's life is cherished in his memory, but the first time to go out hunting remains fresh in his mind. A wolf does not forget the excitement of going out for his first hunt and of learning the howl of a predator. I remember the first time I went out with my brother, he whispered to me saying, "I am a little bit scared ..."

I asked, "Why? ... Are you a dog to be scared?"

He burst out laughing and jumped on me, closing his teeth in on my neck and asked, "Would you like me to show you just how scared I am?"

We laughed a lot that day and jumped around like these two young wolves.

It was an unforgettable day. All of us gathered and fast negotiations began. At the beginning of the hunt, we discuss the likely targets and choose the most difficult and challenging among them.

One of us said, "There is a group of mountain goats grazing there in the horizon."

Another wolf said, "I have found a colony of fat rats that is not guarded by anyone."

A third wolf said, "Towards the west there is a man who breeds six horses that are guarded by two dogs."

I looked into their eyes and said, "Towards the north ten men live in a tent and go out to tend to a flock of sheep, goats and cows, they are guarded by six dogs and the men are efficiently armed."

The target I had just specified was the hardest and so every body agreed upon it. We agreed to attack at midnight. We started out towards the desert before sunset.

My wife and I were in the lead and behind us there was a long train ending with the two young wolves.

The yellowness of the ground started retreating and we ran amidst green fields with just a hint of evening in them. Then the ground resumed its gray color while we were passing through a mountainous area. After that, the ground became dark gray and the scent of Yusuf's brothers came closer. I stopped suddenly and so did the whole train behind me. We strained ourselves to hear.

My wife asked whispering, "Why have you stopped?"

I answered in a whisper, "I feel apprehensive and I feel that I will not see you again after this night."

There was a wide smile of encouragement in her eyes and so I ran towards the target. We started to crawl cautiously when we got closer to the tent. The ten brothers were sleeping quietly outside the tent, and there were no dogs. How could they leave the flock unguarded? Thus, I was surprised and suspicion ate me up.

I said to the wolves, "Take care for I doubt that those sleeping over there are really sleeping."

"You have a lot of apprehensions today my love," said my wife.

I said, "There may be booby-traps set up, we have got nothing to lose by being cautious."

The two frivolous little wolves had gotten closer than they should have to the cattle. The cattle felt danger approaching and so awoke - feeling scared and disturbed.

I ran to get the two little wolves but I was not careful. I advised my group to be cautious but forgot it myself. I had hardly proceeded a little further forward when a strong trap clamped on my hind leg.

I lamented my lost freedom in one long howl, which was contagious and so the other wolves joined in and the air was filled with the sound of shrieking howls.

After that every thing happened fast.

The men jumped up from under their woolen covers and shot their arrows at the wolves and so they ran away howling. The men approached me with sticks and ropes. The sticks struck my body and ropes were thrown upon me and I was bound till I was completely still. At last, I had fallen captive. The image of my missing brother crossed my mind. The way he had been lost, dawned upon me. "Do not be sad brother, for I will be lost just as you were," I thought sadly.

I howled weakly in such a way that implied an order to my family to flee and leave me to my fate. My wife answered with a torn apart loud howl, telling me through her howl that she would come to save me regardless of the consequences. I howled back that she had to go, so that she could take care of the children. I asked her to take special care of the youngest of my wolves. The desert swallowed the echo of our howling. The sand resumed its silence and found me thrown upon the ground bound in ropes.

I raised my head to contemplate those who had captured me. They were without doubt Yusuf's brothers. They made sure that I had given up and tied my feet to a strong tree-branch. Then they carried me to their village with my head bowed.

One of them said joyously, "We are going to tell Ya`qub that this is the wolf that ate Yusuf."

I moaned sadly and so the men laughed and said,

"It is as if the wolf can understand what we are saying."

Then they stopped suddenly and said, "How can we prove to him that this is the killer wolf?"

They held counsel for a while and then they slaughtered one of the sheep and soiled my claws and mouth with its blood. My

mouth was wounded and they added to it new blood to prove the lie. We walked a long way until we reached the outskirts of a small village surrounded by yellow sand and farm land. I felt thirsty when we walked near the river of Palestine. We entered a village lighted by oil lamps. I said to myself while I inhaled the scent of oil, "This is olive oil." The road became narrow and crooked, and the smell of cooked food floated about me making me feel even more miserable.

Yusuf's brothers shouted once they reached a white house surrounded by a planted garden. I memorized the way well throughout that tragic journey, for who knows ...

The brothers knocked on the door and three women opened it. The women screamed from fright when they saw me and ran inside. We entered the house and a mysterious feeling of peace filled my heart. "O my Lord! Whose house could this be?"

The brothers threw me to the ground in front of an old man with a white beard and respectful features. I struck the ground so hard that I started moaning again.

One of the brothers said to the venerable old man,

"This is the wolf that feeds on our sheep."

And another said, "It is also the same wolf that ate Yusuf. We have caught him today. He ate Yusuf yesterday and has returned to us today."

A female voice said, "Look! ... Here is Yusuf's blood on his claws and mouth. Kill him before he wakes up and regains consciousness."

I was contemplating the eyes of the old man and gazing into their pureness." So, this is Ya`qub then," I thought. I realized that he is one of Allah's Prophets. I was filled with a deep sense of comfort when the old man said to his sons, "Leave the wolf to me and go."

One of the brothers said, as he was retreating, "Be careful father for this is a treacherous wolf."

The room became empty of everybody except us. Ya`qub and I were left together. Ya`qub came closer to me, untied my ropes and set me free. I stood before him, bowed my head and raised my tail to greet him.

As he was bringing out a shirt soiled with blood he asked, "Wolf! This is Yusuf's shirt."

The old man's eyes spilled over with tears as he threw Yusuf's shirt to me. "They told me that you ate him, throwing his shirt soiled with blood to me," he said.

I smelled the shirt and closely observed its material, finding that it had no scratches on it. I raised my eyes to the old man and my look said, "Most gracious Prophet, all wolves are innocent from your son's blood."

The old man said, "I know ... I know as much. For how can a wolf eat my son and his shirt remains unharmed. It is my fault. I said to my sons when they wanted to take him out, "I fear that the wolf will eat him while you are distracted." I put forth my fear of you over Allah's care of him and so this has happened to me. Allah, the Almighty, is punishing me and I have lost Yusuf. They brought you in his place."

I said with my eyes, "Sir, I do not know what you are saying, for your words are away beyond me to understand."

Ya`qub said, "Come closer to me wolf."

I came closer to him.

Ya`qub bent over to pick up Yusuf's shirt and once again said, "Come closer to me wolf."

I came closer and closer to him till I put my cheek to his and cried as he cried. Ya`qub extended his hand and patted my head and so all wounds felt relieved. He asked me in a deep, sad voice, "Where have they put Yusuf and how did they find you?"

I said to him, "I do not know what they have done to Yusuf. But I heard them talking of throwing him into a well, and I swear to you O Prophet that I am a stranger wolf that has come from Egypt in search of his brother who went out and never returned. Your sons caught me, tied me up and brought me to you. We, O Prophet, do not eat the flesh of human beings let a lone the blood of Prophets. I wish I had never left Egypt in search of my brother."

As he gathered Yusuf's shirt to his chest, Ya'qub said, "The wolf went out in search of his brother while my sons have lost their brother Yusuf!"

I said, "Oh gracious Prophet! Set me free so that I can return to Egypt. I will not live in a land where the sons of Prophets lie to people and wolves. Who is the wolf now? Me or your sons, gracious sir?"

Ya`qub once again patted my head, then got up and opened the door of his room to me."

His sons attacked me with arrows and they screamed, "Our father has set the monster free."

Ya`qub said, "*Nay, but your own selves have made up a tale. So (for me) patience is most fitting. And it is Allah (Alone) Whose help can be sought against that which you assert.*"

And so I darted out of the house running. I ran with only half of my strength for the other half was drained with the pools of blood I left on the ground. I was struck with more than one fatal wound but I still ran far away from the village.

I do not want to die there. I ran out to the wide desert and found the ground suddenly spinning.

The ground spun until it stood with all its strength upon my head. The spinning of the ground intensified.

Yunus and the Whale

﴾ *Then the whale swallowed him, and he was blameworthy. Had he not been of those who glorify Allah, he would certainly have stayed in its belly until the Day of Resurrection.* ﴿

(As-Saffat: 142-144)

As I turned around in the surging sea, my body formed the shape of the Arabic letter (Noon) on the water. I bent my body and struck the turbulent ocean tides with my tail with a sound like rolling thunder.

After my tail struck the water, it surged forth in waves, leaping again to the surface of the sea like a giant waterfall. All things turn downward on both land and sea including the breath of creatures, the falling fruit and gushing waterfalls. The great whale of the sea breathes out forming a waterfall that churns upward then spirals down again into the sea from whence it came. The whale does not need hands to propel the water that surges around it. Every splashing gush of water propelled by the movement of the massive whale praises and glorifies Allah, the Creator of all things.

I hit the waves again using my tail and listened to the sound carried by the wind as it exploded into the air like the first one.

I know that when I collide with the waves, the sound of the clash can be heard from miles away and frightens thousands of creatures in the sea but in fact, this is simply a small part of the power of Allah, as the sea and wind trembles with fear in front of the Owner of all power.

In spite of being the most powerful creature in the sea, I am weaker than running water in front of Allah. I may be the giant of the sea but my true crown is made of truthfulness and the richness of reality. Both these things, the truth and reality, constitute the supreme power that can be found in Allah's creation. I was crowned in the water with my ability to bend myself in all kinds of shapes. I was given that might, which even I myself cannot comprehend but my whole being bows down before it.

I moved my tail and sped off.

All oceans and seas are my home. The outstretched blue water under me is the paper on which I record my story and no miracle is similar to that of writing on water or walking over it. No one can walk over water except for the Prophets. Walking over water is restricted to those who are truthful and sincere in both word and deed. The land however, is trodden by liars who are created from dust. Writing upon stones remains seen to curious onlookers but there exists that which sinks beneath the depths of the sea and disappears, keeping the secret recorded and herein lies its greatness, which is borrowed; The borrowed greatness of water.

All great creatures of the universe seek the brilliancy of eternal greatness. They realize in the depth of their hearts that death is the natural end of all things. All creatures know this fact

deeply and intuitively except the human being. He, in his foolishness, remains oblivious of this fact. Man! The only one who dares to try and make a god of himself. The one who deludes himself that he will live this worldly life forever. If it was possible for my wild mouth to laugh mockingly, I would do so, but I cannot laugh as I know nothing except to frown gloomily and be serious.

I do not like human beings and this applies for all the whales. It is an old enmity based on a story that will be mentioned later. Remembering the human being makes my blood boil and so I go down into the furthest depths and then I collide with the water using my tail and return to its surface. Here on the surface of the sea, I jump up towards the sky! A giant leap which is the prostration of whales. People prostrate on the ground while whales prostrate towards the sky as it is, after all, their ground.

I swim in the northern seas where the eye of the sun does not wink nor set. I see the sun as a yellow disk drowned in green water. The open brilliance of the sun, which spreads out upon the water, suggests loneliness, which is the usual companion of the truly great in the world.

No one can compare to a sperm whale in its greatness.

From among all sperm whales that swim under the water, Almighty Allah chose me to swallow Yunus (Jonah). I knew only after swallowing him that he was a Prophet. I confess that it was the most difficult experience I ever had in all my long life.

Whales do not sweat ...

Whales do not shed tears in tenderness or love ...

However, I did sweat and cry.

I was careful that no creature would see me while I was weeping. My position and standing in the water is like an unscratched old throne and I would not like that it be scarified.

I have a body that is longer than a middling island. I weigh equivalent to one hundred thousand rocks. When such a huge body plunges into the depths of the sea, it makes the most dangerous sharks burst forth in fear until they crash their bodies onto the rocks because of their great fear.

Despite having such great power, I wept.

I do not want to end my story before starting it. What I have experienced was so great and hard that it led me to be overcome by illness.

My intestines began unwell and I knew I was approaching death.

I shook my head, and my tail moved in a semicircle and burst forth.

I write down on the water ...

Water swallows the secret while I continue writing.

Millions of years ago when the sea was as young as a child, my grandparents were living on the land.

There is an old picture that lies somewhere in my giant body, deep within my mind and in a place concealed by a throne of oil. This picture occupies a place between the meat, the blood and the nerves. In this picture, there appears a gray and foggy land in which there were volcanoes. Purple vapor mingled with a yellow color that rose from the volcanoes. Dinosaurs and our grandparents were walking on the land ... Our grandparents were

bigger than dinosaurs that began to be extinct at that time. Dinosaurs were huge but had little intelligence. They had a lot of desires and were unable to adapt themselves to the changing circumstances of the earth. Our grandparents were suffering the same tragedy.

The earth was being prepared for the arrival of a new species named the human being. This species was not well known by us. We heard hair-raising stories about the human being. Angels were talking about him with surprise and love. The approaching of his decent bore a warning to all wild creatures on the land. No one knew why all the wild animals on the earth began to fight each other so fiercely and shed blood to such a horrible extent. All large, wild animals died out except for the grandparents of the whales who were the biggest and mightiest wild animals so we won the battle. Nevertheless, the land became full of blood and ruin and that was why our grandparents rushed to the sea in troops. They looked at the land and realized that their life on it was impossible. They had no rivals to fight and no food to eat.

Our ancestors began to jump into water as they had only two choices: either to stay on land and starve or to scurry for a shelter of safety in water. Thousands of our forefathers jumped into the water.

We had hands, feet, heads and noses. People think that the whale is a fish. This is an insult to all whales. Our blood is hot while the blood of fish is cold. We are mammals that lived on the land during prehistoric times and then we moved to live in the sea in order to clear a space for the human being.

Pardon me but my blood boils whenever I talk about the human being. I burst forth within the sea in great irritation. My

ancestors were told while they were jumping into the seas, "Blessed be you ... O great creatures ... You will be the kings of the sea, not contended with anyone save human beings who will be in pursuit of you whether you are alive or dead. You will be the perfume of your enemy after your death as well as oil for his lamps, food for his children and medicine for his diseases. The Creator of the universe has subjected you to man."

Our descent into the sea was not meant to be an insult. On the contrary, it was a kind of honor exactly as man was honored by his descent onto the earth. Water is four times greater than land ... So our chance to propagate in the water was four times greater than on land. Our food is fourfold.

We went down into the sea with a deep-rooted picture of a fatal struggle against the human being. This was accompanied with some kind of surprise.

This was millions of years ago. At that time we were not in need of hands. Our feet, heads and noses were altered. The previous wild animals of the land are now the whales of the sea. All these secrets were narrated to me by a cell in the body of my mother before my birth. I do not remember where I was born but I do remember my father's face ... He was frightful with a white face, a high lobe and his giant tail. He was ninety meters and a half long. My mother was his third wife. She was about twenty-five meters long. She was beautiful, elegant and her color was nearly bright gray. She was the ideal mother. I never saw her smile and neither did my father. One day I asked my father, "Why do whales not smile?"

He replied, "Be quiet! How can the mightiest animals of the sea smile?"

He looked at my mother angrily and said, "Your baby is warm-hearted like you ... Damn you ..."

My mother took me to the sea away from my father and whispered to me "My honey ... You are a monster, so do not disappoint your Mum and Dad."

I had a delightful childhood were it not for my father's cruel comments and fierce looks.

When I was born, I was about ten meters and a half long or a bit longer. My father swam around me and addressed my mother saying, "His length is all right ... I like his white color ... I want him to be like me."

He said so and dove into the water. My father was famous throughout all the oceans for having certain peculiarities such as violence, strength and speed. All monsters and masters of the sea should have these three characteristics.

After growing up, I realized that my father was the master of all the seas.

I spent six months in my mother's womb, followed by another six months of suckling. During this period, I saw my father only twice. I confess that I loved my mother more than my father throughout the suckling period. She was tender and kind. I never saw her angry except for one time when I was attacked by a bevy of young sharks. First, I imagined that they came to play with me, but soon I realized that they came to attack and bite me. I was only ten meters long. I shouted to my mother, who came rapidly, breaking up the ocean and her tail turned to a gigantic fan hitting blind and hard strikes on all sides. I was astonished when I saw the strikes of her tail tearing

up the bodies of sharks, who fled away at top speed. They did not succeed in getting anything from me save a piece of meat from my tail that turned to be a distinguishing mark.

From that time onwards, there exists a deep hatred inside me for all sharks. I became famous for my fondness of devouring a lot of them in return for their old debt. The only moment of fear that I witnessed in my childhood because of sharks was given back to them as nights of horrible fright and years of continuing fear.

"The sperm whale with the funny tail is coming." That is how all the sea animals announced my entrance. At this time all monsters of the sea ran away because of their absolute fear so that I could pass.

When I was weaned, my father came and pointed to my tail. He asked my mother, "What happened to his tail?"

She replied haughtily, "like father, like son ... I left him alone and a group of sharks attacked him." "Great!" my father said. "What did he do?" he asked.

Then, my mother looked at me fearfully and said, "He acted like a young monster."

My father struck the water with his tail, "Thanks Allah ... Thanks Allah ... O monster follow me ... Your childhood is over and you will start your lessons tomorrow."

I was surprised that my father believed that I had acted like a monster. What would he do if he knew that I screamed out calling my mother? How great are the intelligence and cunning of females! My mother was using her words to protect me against my father's violence. She told me later that if my father

knew what had happened, he would kill me by striking me with his tail. He had killed three weak whales, who were born to my father's other wives.

He killed them while saying, "It is better for monsters to die than to live as a good -for- nothing."

I said that I loved my mother more than my father during the period of my suckling but after that I loved my father for two years that represented the period of my learning. After that, my love for my mother submerged into the depth of the ocean and my love for my father became immersed in the vastness of the waves. From that time forward, I became a real monster, after giving up love.

After that, no one can stand in front of me, swim before me or hear about me without trembling. I used to consider the one who saw me and did not become full of fear as a creature that behaved impudently. This is a crime that should be punished at once. And so, my speed surpasses my self-control and brings me face-to-face with my rival. My tail moves towards him leaving him destroyed. And my mouth is opened in front of him, swallowing him into my depths. These three fast and musical movements are fulfilled before the victim can realize what is going on. Sometimes I open my mouth and burst forth leaving silence after my passing. My belly becomes the grave of every rival even before his death as I swallow him alive to die slowly within my belly. After that I jump up over the water to thank Allah for all His bounties and to ask Him, while I am trembling out of my fear of Him, His Satisfaction.

It was natural that the first lesson I learned, from my father was practical training on how to use my tail. Our school was in

the faraway northern seas where floating mountains of ice stood as a witness for all time to come with their complete silence.

There were six male whales in my class. The gloomy teacher was my father, who moved his tail towards anyone that made a mistake, giving him a light blow whose impact lasted for many long nights. It was as if a mountain of rocks had fallen on your side, abdomen or your head depending on where the strike was placed. During the first days in school, I remembered with grief the sweet days of my suckling. My mother swam on her side, looking at me, while I was bending getting stuck to her side and gobbling up her breast in my mouth. I did not stare at her breast, rather I stared away with stability and calmness. It was as if I had two lives at the same time. While the whale is suckling, he is occupied with a feeling that he is enjoying delightful memories that are not aquatic. Such memories come from the world of the soul where wonderful peace and great security prevail. But this time was over and the old peace had been eliminated during the first days of study.

Naturally I was absolutely terrified of my father and I was eager to be with my mother. As if he realized what was going on inside us, the gloomy teacher said, "When a whale abandons his mother, he departs his small prison and when he leaves his father, he deserts his big prison. Then, he becomes a monster in the oceans that cannot be stopped by anyone." My father said so and jumped up making a gigantic flow of water descend around him as if there were a thousand islands jumping up. When he descended into the water, he struck the water with his tail violently causing a clatter in our weak and young bones.

The teacher said, "This is the simplest strike by the tail. I want the faraway horizon to be shaken by the sounds of explosions caused by your strikes upon the water. Now, we will start with the fiercest monster amongst you." Then, he pointed at me with his tail.

I asked, "Will I jump or strike the water first?" He replied, "O foolish one! Jump up first."

I jumped up and he shouted at me enough to blow my veins while I was jumping.

He shouted, "You jump like the desperate sharks." Then he changed his view saying, "Your jump is like that of the funny dogfish."

He shouted again, "You have to perform a royal jump ... a real jump ... up ... I want you to reach the sun with your heads." On and on he spoke and ordered, "Up again ... Now strike with your tail ..."

I imagined that my strike was so strong that its splash would put out the sun. But my father said loudly, "I did not hear but a sigh of a weak fish."

He struck the water with his tail again and became more agitated than the sea. And we also struck the water trying to imitate him.

The training continued for one full day. At the end, I imagined that the mountains of ice were about to melt because of our continued effort.

When the sun appeared at the end of the ocean as a red disk, our teacher said, while he was turning to go, "You will sleep here until the morning ..."

No one of us had thought about his mother as the previous six months had been overwhelmed with the existence of one day of hard work.

We had lost the previous days that were in paradise ... and here we were descending into the seas of tiredness without knowing our fault.

I slept in my place because I was absolutely exhausted. The next day, I opened my eyes upon the second lesson concerning how to use the tail. We were awakened by a loud explosion made by our teacher while he was striking the water with his own magnificent tail.

My father was moving himself with ease and nimbleness that rippled with great might. Moreover, the beauty of his nimbleness was derived from his strength. In every charming and beautiful thing, there lies a greater role fulfilled by might.

In the beginning of the second lesson, my father communicated to us but without speaking, "There are five big movements to a whale's tail:

First: The tail is used as a flipper that helps the whale to move and burst forth.

Second: It is used as a shield in case of defence or attack.

Third: The whale uses it to sweep away and scavenge water.

Fourth: The tail is used to achieve a kind of relaxation on the water required during performing prayers.

Fifth: The whale uses his tail when he lifts the two portions vertically on the water to be ready for the glorification of Allah."

The aforementioned movements appear easy but in fact they are extremely difficult to fulfill in the water. Due to its horizontal position, the whale's tail moves in a different way from the tails of other sea animals. It never plaits. Braid is a symptom of defect when it is concerned with human beings or fish. The whale is clear of imperfection. His tail is the only means to defend himself. It is goes round like a wave and then jumps quickly to the back, so it is the tail that enables the whale to achieve a movement of outburst that is unique, and bouncing when he swims violently and furiously. But the flippers at the side of the whale help him to plow the sea.

We learned from our teacher's lessons that when the sperm whale fights another one of his species, he uses his mighty head and jaws, but when he struggles against a human being, the whale only has to use his tail. This is not out of contempt or disdain for the human being, but it is because the use of superfluous power against a mean creature is nothing but a waste of effort that is faulty to the utmost extent.

So, the head and the jaws are used to fight against monsters and whales. The tail alone is used to overwhelm man and his ships. In the whale's tail, there lurks a delicate sensitivity. Sometimes there stands a water sparrow on the tail of a swimming whale that instantly feels and determines the species of the sparrow by means of its weight. The whale is able to recognize the bird and from which island it comes.

The moment in which thousands of whales start glorifying their lord coincides with the moments in which the sun rises. At such moments, the disk of the sun is still red and the yellowish tinge has not yet reached it. At that time, all whales lift the two

portions of their tails, making them oriented to space, vertical on the sea and directed towards the heavens. From the depths that have no depths ... the huge tail appears as if it is trying spasmodically to reach the seventh heaven. Really, there is no greater scene in living nature than this.

My heart becomes submissive whenever I remember this scene and how the bodies and tail of whales swing vertically on the sea in humiliation before Allah to glorify Him in the morning. At that time, the sea witnesses that the whales are its most devout and pious creatures.

During the second year of my study, I showed an excellence that distinguished me from my colleagues and it was a sign of greater things to come. My tail, that had been deformed by the fangs of sharks, became a spot of fire that flamed in the water pushing me to distinction. Sharks were not our basic food. The octopus was our favorite meal. On my part I preferred to make sharks my basic food as well as octopuses. I used to advance violently with my head, between the groups of sharks, moving my tail at the same, with its lethal movements. In a few seconds, I was able to get rid of them all. Then, I wash my mouth of their blood in the water.

Waves passed by and the period of study came to an end. There remained only one year in which we would spend studying the sea currents. Then we would go out to face man.

I remember the first time I saw him when my father led the flock towards the warm Southern Seas. We saw wooden toys made of plants on land called trees. And on these wooden toys there were strange creatures, walking on their feet, moving their hands and puffing smoke out of their mouths.

Our leader named Al-Ashhab (the gray one) said, "These are the ships ... And those are the sons of man."

I raised my head, contemplating these worms that were on the board of sticks and I was full of surprise. I asked myself, "Is this our old and dangerous enemy? His size is no more than the size of a scar in my deformed tail! How is it that all mighty monsters are wary of such a mean creature?"

I asked my father while we were going back, "Is this the human being?"

He said, "I think you look down at his size with contempt, don't you?"

"Yes," I replied.

He said, "You think that you are stronger than him, don't you?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "And you think that you can tear his ship to shreds and swallow it with him, don't you?

"Of course," I asserted.

He said, "Of course you are wrong ... This creature that you see as a spot or a scar is the most dangerous of all our enemies."

"Where does his danger lurk?" I asked.

My father replied, "Have you seen his head and how it is covered with black hair?"

I said, "Yes, I have seen that but what is strange about it?"

My father said, "The secret of man's strength lies in his covered head."

Filled with surprise, I said, "The size of his whole head equals the size of my smallest ivory tooth."

My father said in an emphasizing tone, "Your teeth are exposed while his head is covered and the difference between both of you is no more than this. You are strong and you do not hide your might. While he is weak but he hides his strength. You will never recognize from where the strike of man stems. You will not be able to take precautions as man does not announce his thoughts to his enemy. You come close to him, filled with surprise, while contemplating this wooden whale that is floating and carrying creatures that puff out smoke. All of a sudden, your heart is torn to pieces and you immerse in your blood and perish. You do not know the source of the strike or how it comes? You only see man standing in his place as if he is moving something with his hands. You strike with your body but a human being does not use his body. He uses things we do not know. No dead whale has told us how he was destroyed or by what means he was grabbed towards human beings or how they tore his body to pieces. All we know is that whenever the sperm whales are captured by man, the amount of light on his ships reaches to the extent that you look at the ship during the night as if it is a torch of light."

After my father's words, the matter became more confusing. I was filled with certainty that man possesses powers that whales do not have at all. I tried in vain to think about these powers but I did not reach a satisfactory conclusion.

It was not long until I forgot about the human being. But my surprise remained within my depths because of the unanswered question regarding the secrets of man's might. I turned temporarily to look after my own concerns.

I had to prove myself in the seas of the south, the north, the east and the west. It became my duty to fight against all species of whales until they crowned me! Then I moved to fight against other kinds of monsters. After that, I turned to stand against and horrify all creatures in the ocean until they enthroned me! Then, I had to struggle against the presently crowned sperm whale. If I achieved victory over him, I would be the master of the sea.

The fight against other species lasted ten years. During that time, my father became old and unable to move rapidly. Fat increased around his body and he became like an island floating and puffing. As it is usual with whales, the waves granted my father a pension. Then the strongest sperm whale became the master of the sea.

The whale that occupied my father's position was a mighty black whale with a white tail. My father was watching my slow but confident progress in a contemplative manner. He had never spoken to me about his expectations for me to be enthroned upon the ocean. I had never talked to him about that matter. We used to treat each other with great reservation and absolute respect. I had lost my love for him and there remained only my respect.

Everytime I met him I used to ask, "How are you old whale?"

And he used to reply saying, "My bones have become heavy and I have started to find a strange taste in my mouth."

I asked him, "What does this mean old whale?

He answered, "Death has started to occupy your father. So when will you ascend the tops of the waves so that your father's bones may find rest beside those of the ocean?"

I used to answer this question saying, "O old whale this will be in the near future ... You may witness before your death the transition of the water crown to your son."

The transition of the water crown required a merciless fight against the crowned whale that had a great jaw and a mighty tail. I was as strong as him. And in spite of being sure that I could beat him, I delayed the fight against him for a short time, as I did not want that degraded victory in which the vanquisher won the battle by withstanding for a long time or striking more or exerting greater effort. I wanted an overwhelming superiority by tearing my enemy up in a moment. To achieve such a goal, I had to defer the struggle for a short time.

During that time, I was training myself on something that was unknown to other whales. One day a powerful wave inspired me with this matter. I had seen a wave crashing against a rock on the seashore. I know that waves are more flexible and weaker than rocks. So how does the weaker destroy the stronger?

I continued thinking and remembering what my father had warned me about so I said to myself, "The secret of man may be discovered upon decoding the secret of this wave." So I went on studying waves for months.

At last, I discovered the secret. I discovered that waves do never cease their mighty motion. Waves do not become bored with striking rocks. Waves undergo a course of training every day. This is the secret of their strength.

I went back in my memory to my first days of study remembering how whales stop their daily training after the

termination of the period of study and are content with practical life.

I decided to be an exception to my species and to train myself in secrecy. So everyday I used to hide for half a day in the same old place of our school. The place was abandoned as nobody was trained in it any more. The mountains of ice that witnessed our punishment while we were children were still there high and calm.

There existed within me an ambiguous desire to destroy these mountains. After all, they were the only witnesses to my weakness during my childhood. So, the highest one of those witnesses should perish so that the rest of them would fear.

I had chosen the mightiest to start with. I was moving my tail and pounced on the ice mountain with my head and jaw. The first time, the strike left me dizzy while the mountain remained as it was without even a scratch. I tried again with gentleness, then more powerfully, and then violently. At the end of the day, there was a hole like a cave in the mountain.

My head was hurting me a little but I felt it getting harder. My head was more than thirty meters long and the mountain was so high and immovable.

While I was leaving the mountain I said to myself, "Training can achieve everything. Tomorrow the mountain will be removed."

For three years I hit the mountain with my head. Then came the final moment and the mountain crashed. It had been split into two portions making a tremendous sound that made me swim away from it. Then I raised myself above the water,

contemplating that huge block that was taking its new course in the water

I was filled with monstrous haughtiness and so I returned. I did not destroy the mountain totally or even move it from its place but I broke it into two halves. I made a long split that produced two smaller mountains. It was over. The continuity of the black whale with his white tail on the throne of water would also be brought to an end.

During the period of my training in which I had exerted all my strength, the crowned king of the whales was spending a nice time in the warm seas, enjoying the company of his new females, exactly like a fat and lazy mullet. The king, the monster of the depths, turned to be a master of love and a flirt. The interior affairs of the whales were subject to disturbance. The weak females and sick whales were killed in troops and the ocean was dyed red with their warm and foolish blood.

It was evident that the sea was no longer possessed by whales. Man had made a raid on land then he invaded the sea. Such a problem should not be faced with hesitation. The king of the whales should be dethroned. Such an old whale that was inclined to accompany females did not deserve the crown of green herbs that was around his head whenever he emerged from the depths.

I did not understand this desire in females. I had not touched a female whale since my birth. I did not know about contact with a female body save my mother's who suckled me. After that, I believed in my father's viewpoint concerning females. I believed that the whale that keeps the company of females for a long time acquires many of their habits and becomes unable to continue as a monster.

I know that whales assemble every year during the season of love in the warm seas under the leadership of one whale. At that time, every whale has the right to fight against this leader to be enthroned. This struggle is usually for females.

It was early. Well before the annual meeting but I was not able to be patient and wait the whole winter as my father was declining rapidly towards death and I did not want to disappoint him before his death.

One day, the whole group went out led by this mean black whale with a white tail. We were chased by a hunting ship. Three boats from that ship followed us but I was able to return and destroy them but I preferred to wait a little to see how the leader of the group would act. The leader hit the water with his tail many successive strikes but he remained far away from the ship. I was able to detect a hidden fear in his strikes. Then I saw something rushing towards my father. Then there blasted "ah" sound came from the old whale. I ran towards him asking, "O old whale what happened?"

He said, "Something unknown to me ripped my body. I can see myself turning to be a light in the torches of man. I can see myself hung on the land and dangled from the roofs of houses."

I said, "Do not worry, you will live."

I got out of the water, turned back and dashed towards the ship that was coming at top speed towards me. The leader of the group shouted at me to watch out. I did not pay attention to his shout and the strength of my jaws increased as well as the motion of tail.

The sound of the clash was tremendous. The foremost part of the ship was split into two halves and the whales cried, "The forehead of the white whale with a deformed tail has been crashed."

I turned back after the clash, moving my tail in every direction. The ship was not as strong as the mountain and I had previously trained myself on the mountain.

Some moments later, the ship with its boats and people had disappeared under a sheet of water and immersed in the blueness of the ocean.

My father was wounded. The black whale came close to him trying to discover where the pain lay but I shouted at him to stop dead in his tracks as he was no more than a feeble fish and not a whale. He stopped and turned to face me. My father struck the water with his tail and puffed ... I realized that my father understood my intentions. My father was in the throes of death and wanted to see me as the master of the seas before he died. My struggle against the whale did not last for a long time. I rushed towards him before he could think what to do and shut my jaws upon his head until my mighty ivory fangs plunged into him. I crashed his head in the same way as I smashed the fish eggs by falling heavily upon them when I give rest to my body on the seabed.

My strength lies in my head while his might was in his tail. I broke his head into pieces without giving him a chance to use his tail.

The two whales fell into the depths of the water. First my father's body and then that of the master of the seas.

I raised my tail exactly upright and puffed ... Then the whales raised their tails likewise and puffed ... They announced their surrender to me as their king. Then we all submitted ourselves to Allah, the Lord of life and death.

Waves and waves passed. There was no whale in the four oceans that could equal me. All the monsters of the sea offered allegiance to me and the waves submitted to me.

The secret of the sea currents was revealed to me. There remained only the secret of man that was closed before my mind.

I have sworn that no human being would pass across the waves that witnessed my father's death and my ascension to the throne. I have sworn to crash every ship that passed this spot of water.

Man descended onto the earth and got us out of the land, and then he started his raid on the sea. So we should strive against his attempts to occupy the sea, and restore him back to the land. I decided to do that and I remained true to my word for years.

For many years, no ship was able to pass across the sea and be safe. No human being dared to get into the water and return safely. If he was settled in the belly of a shark, he would not enjoy his residence there as we swallow the shark itself into our bellies.

In spite of the continuous struggle against man, and in spite of his defeat versus the victory of whales, there remained the secret of man as a code that could not be broken.

How could a human being be saved from the terror of a whale? This question worried me for a long time.

One day, I was lying in the deepest part of the ocean. I settled my bones upon the sea floor and slept. My breast was full of air that would be enough until dawn. Then suddenly, I was awakened. I did not know why this happened. I saw myself ascending to the surface of the sea without any obvious reason. I imagined that the Hand of Omnipotence that sets the smallest wave in motion was driving my tail.

I reached the surface of the sea that was furious and over abundant.

"Is this the beginning of a tempest?" I thought.

I puffed a little and decided to return to the bottom. The spot in the bottom that I had chosen was so serene in comparison with the surface.

Then there arose a question in my mind like lightning, "How could the surface be furious while the seabed was serene?" I know from the water currents what time the tempest will start. I know this before its coming.

"Have the laws of waves changed while I was sleeping?" This question bewildered me.

Suddenly, a ship started to swing here and there. I swam towards it rapidly and violently deciding to help it to sink with one mighty strike. I had hardly reached it when I forgot the reason behind my coming. I was swimming behind the ship as if I was having a leisurely trip.

I did not know what had happened to me. It was extremely dark so I said, "Maybe I am still asleep!"

I saw something falling from the ship. I advanced forwards towards that thing, finding myself in front of my old enemy. A

man that had become lost in the furious turmoil. I approached him and opened my jaws. A powerful wave pushed him into my mouth. I swallowed him and closed my ivory fangs.

I was trembling when I heard a voice but I did not see anyone. The voice was coming from all directions. It was the voice of an angel sent by Allah.

The angel said, "We do not make him sustenance for you but we make your belly as a shelter and well-fortified place for him. Swallow him but do not break a bone of his and do not scratch his skin."

In the beginning, I did not understand what was meant by these words. I inhaled deeply and dove into the depths of the sea. I continued diving until I reached the bottom. I gave rest to my bones and slept. I was filled with a sense that I was not myself but someone else. I confess that what I said, struck surprise but it really expressed my true feelings at that time.

Before sleeping, I thought about all the wonders I had seen. I wondered how the surface was furious and hit with a tempest while the bottom was serene.

I asked myself in surprise, "What was up with me when I saw the ship and did not destroy it?" Who was that human being who fell from it? Did he throw himself into water or did someone else throw him down? Why did he throw himself down? What had he done? Why did I swallow him? What was the meaning of the words that had warned me against causing harm to him? How could I swallow him without scratching his body?" All these questions made me dizzy and so I surrendered to sleep.

I woke up when there was no more air in my lungs. I went to the surface and it was clear and free of storms except for one wave. I went on puffing. I remembered what had happened the day before and I imagined that it was a dream. Then it was time for my breakfast, so I swam into a gulf where there were many octopuses. After I reached the gulf, I tried to open my jaw to have my breakfast but I did not have the desire to eat. I asked myself, "What is this? Am I ill without knowing it?"

Then a fat shark passed beside me. It was my habit to swallow such a fish alive and to digest it slowly inside my belly. I tried to open my mouth to swallow it but I could not. I had no desire to open my mouth.

I realized that all the wonders I had seen the day before were not a dream as I had previously thought. What had happened the day before was a reality with tangible results. My shut jaw and my disinterested belly were two proofs of a confusing change.

I jumped up towards the sky asking for an explanation for what had happened.

I felt his Presence without seeing Him.

I bowed my body in reverence to the angel and said, "O generous angel, the white whale with a deformed tail is ill and has dreams. Yesterday I had a horrible accident."

The angel said, "Yesterday there was a miracle."

"Would you, the commander in the sea, tell me who I swallowed yesterday?" I asked.

He said, "You have swallowed Dha An-Noon."

I said, "Pardon me for being ignorant, but who is Dha An-Noon?"

He said, "A Prophet who is meek and similar to a kind waft."

I said, "Did he throw himself from the side of the ship?"

"He cast lots and lost," the angel replied.

"I have swallowed him without knowing that he is a Prophet. I did not know that swallowing him would require your attendance or the attendance of any other angel," I said meekly.

He said, "Allah has not made him sustenance for you, has He?"

I said, "But he is inside my belly ... It is over! He has become my sustenance."

"No!" the angel replied. "He is in your belly but not sustenance for you."

I said, "So why did I swallow him?"

He said, "You are a shelter and well-fortified place for him."

"How could a monster be a shelter and a well-fortified place for such a kind-hearted Prophet?" I asked curiously.

The angel said, "O whale ... Contemplate the human body ... Man is more monstrous than you. Contemplate the spirit of man or his soul ... Is it not a concrete incarnation of purity and meekness? Contemplate how both of them live together ... the body constitutes a cloak for the soul and the soul is the gist of the body. The body is the monster and the soul is the home of meekness."

"How can the soul be saved from the body?" I asked.

"Exactly in the same way as meekness can be saved from a monster," replied the angel.

"And how can meekness be saved from a monster?" I asked.

He said, "As Yunus will be saved from your belly."

"And how will Yunus be saved from my belly?" I asked.

He said, "You will know everything ... Just remember that you are an image of a whale. Of course you are a monster but not more monstrous than man's body. The body has covered the soul and let's see how the soul will be saved."

The angel went away and left me alone. I continued swimming on a beautiful, blue surface whose blueness I doubted. The angel's words made the matter even more ambiguous in my mind. He told me that I was an image of a whale. "Does that mean that I am not a real whale? Are all the surrounding events just dreams? Is my monstrous entity no more a miracle or is it a symbol of something I have nothing to do with?" I thought.

The sun ascended its throne in the heart of the sky while I was still swimming and puffed. I got tired of swimming, so I went to rest in the seabed. I twisted my gigantic tail and dove. I was diving in both black water and deep thinking.

"What is Dha An-Noon doing in my belly now? And how can meekness be saved from a monster?" I sympathized with him for the first time in my life. The word sympathy is not found in the dictionary of monsters. It is an extinct word that is no longer used by monsters except if they are at death's door.

I asked myself, "Am I an ill whale awaiting his death? Am I no more a monster as I was?" But throughout my long way into the depths I saw the creatures in the bottom fleeing in front of me. They were horrified, crashing themselves upon the rocks and running away.

"I am still a monster as I was ... So, from where does this tenderness come? Is the creature that I swallowed yesterday responsible for the weakness that has overwhelmed me? He is a Prophet, isn't he? He is blessed, isn't he? He is gentle-hearted, isn't he? No doubt, he is the one who is responsible for all the meekness and distress that has befallen me. There is no greater distress for whales than becoming meek."

I wanted to hate him but I could not. I tried to forget him but I failed. The Prophet occupied my belly and mind together and I thanked Allah for not swallowing the shark in the morning for if I had swallowed it, it would have eaten him. I forgot the fact that we were expelled from the land because of man. I forgot all the enmity between our species and his.

I went on thinking about one question, "What is the Prophet doing in my belly now?"

I thought about the black water in which I was diving and my belly that was closed around Dha An-Noon, and I felt the greatness of his tragedy.

I bounced against the seabed and I stopped the motion of my tail. Thousands of sea animals and monsters passed by me and greeted me rabidly out of fear. I saw them shining and shedding light.

In the faraway depths of the sea, all the laws of the sun die out and so does the sun itself beyond the first one third of the sea. At this point, there begins the kingdom of darkness.

The light of the swimming monsters reminded me of the darkness of my belly and I wondered, "How can the Prophet stand living in all this darkness?"

"None has the right to be worshipped but you (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with you] truly, I have been of the wrong doers."

The voice was unknown to me. I know all the voices of animals, fish and monsters. That voice was surely not one of them. I moved my tail around myself to see who was hidden in the depths of the darkness but I did not find anyone. "*None has the right to be worshipped but you (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You] Truly, I have been of the wrong doers."*

The voice went on echoing without interruption. It continued without rest or wavering. A word by word ... The sentence had hardly ended when it started again ... Its circulation was like that of the sun or the moon.

My mind became dizzy in my attempt to know the source of that voice. Then all of a sudden, there shone in my mind, that the voice was coming out from my own body. I witnessed something like light emanating from my body with every glorification of Allah ... I realized that the imprisoned Prophet in my belly was glorifying Allah.

All my body was trembling. I felt that I was sweating drops such as that of a diamond. I moved my tail and raised it up from

the bottom of the sea. I said to myself, "I am going to follow Dha An-Noon who is not followed by anyone."

"None has the right to be worshipped but You (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You]. Truly, I have been of the wrong doers."

The words were trembling and shedding a kind of love that enlightened the darkness of the bottom of the sea. The water shone and had such a kindness that I never knew existed in the water. There existed a kind of connection between my belly and the water, plants that were petrified at the bottom, the old stones and the sandy clay.

The seabed woke up and listened to the glorification of Dha An-Noon *"None has the right to be worshipped but You (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You] Truly, I have been of the wrong doers."*

The Prophet worshiped Allah without partners and exalted Him with submission and obedience and charged himself at the same time of being a wrongdoer. I went on thinking about the meaning of the word "wrong". What does this word mean? How could Dha An-Noon be a wrongdoer? What did he do? These questions lay so heavily upon my mind and threatened to crush me.

That was why I rushed to the surface of the water prostrating and asked, "What did the Prophet, whom I carry in my belly, do?"

But there was no sound except for that of the waves. No one answered me.

"Does this question constitute a crossing beyond my rank among creatures?" I thought.

My lungs were filled with air and I went on puffing. The sun was setting and the Prophet did not stop glorifying Allah, the Almighty.

I watched the sunset.

My heart was bleeding and I was annoyed as if I had been thrown outside the sea. I was sorry for him. I was hit with a strike of sorrow that left me lost in grief. This strike was like that of an unknown man that hit a whale leading him to his bloody end.

I asked myself once again, "Is the Prophet's sadness contagious?"

Suddenly, I remembered that my belly was working. The process of digestion was taking place.

"Maybe I have digested my companion who is in my belly," I thought.

I said, "My companion" and I felt the truthfulness of my words.

I wanted to stop the process of digestion but I could not. How could a creature be a monster and not control his belly. Where is the wildness if a part within his body disobeys him? I exerted a useless effort to control my belly but I failed.

I decided to fast.

I said to myself, "Maybe fasting will save him."

I went on opening my jaw, filling my lungs with air that I might save him from suffocation.

"What will happen if he is suffocated or digested?"

"What will I say to the angel who has commanded me to keep him safe?"

I went on asking myself such questions.

Fear shook me so I went on striking the water with my tail, mighty and horrible strokes while I was shouting, and "O Lord, I want him to live ... I want him to be saved."

A kind of strange terror struck me. I went on diving and getting out of the water without aim. The whales thought that I was ill and so they came.

A whale asked me, "What is wrong with the white whale with a deformed tail?"

I said, "I have a secret inside me that I cannot tell you about, so go away."

The whales went away and left me alone.

Waves went up and down. Glorification went up and up. It never went down, stopped, or rested.

The sun sank into the sea.

The night put on its black clothes and my heart put on the black clothes of sadness.

I filled my lungs with air and moved my tail going down to the bottom of the sea.

I rested my bones upon those at the bottom. I tried to think.

I attempted to be in touch with him. So I whispered, in the middle of night, at the bottom of the sea and feeling great fear, "O noble Prophet! What can I do for you?"

Dha An-Noon said, "*None has the right to be worshipped but You (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You]. Truly, I have been of the wrong doers.*"

I said, "O noble prophet! How can I help you to be saved?"

He said, "*None has the right to be worshipped but You (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You] Truly, I have been of the wrong doers.*"

I realized that he was not listening to me ... He was busy glorifying Allah. I kept silent and stopped posing questions. I raised my tail vertically on the bottom and went on swimming my own way.

A festival was held at the bottom of the sea among the creatures. The sand went up and glorified. The fish assembled and went on glorifying. The whales and the monsters came and each one of them went on glorifying Allah in the way he had been taught by Allah.

I continued glorifying Allah while at the same time I felt great horror.

I had a monstrous body but I was trembling.

"Does the body feel afraid while glorifying Allah?" I thought.

All I knew was that I was ready to do anything to save Yunus. All my stock of air ran out, so I burst forth rapidly up to the surface. I went on swimming and puffing.

A ship passed by me but I did not pay attention to it. I was starving but I abstained from food for two days. I usually eat about one thousand kilos of fish per day. However, I decided to continue fasting.

My belly started shrinking and my intestines became ill. I could not allow myself to swallow any food after swallowing Yunus. The motion of my belly would lead to his death. So, let my belly be immovable except for the painful motion of shrinking but not that of digestion.

"None has the right to be worshipped but You (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You]. Truly, I have been of the wrong doers," the Prophet was still in his glorification of his Lord.

I realized that I was killing myself by fasting ... but I realized at the same time that Yunus would not be saved from my belly except by killing myself.

Yunus had become another soul for me.

I had become "another" body for Yunus.

The soul could be saved only with the destruction of the body.

Then came the third day.

I was fasting for the third day. The blood of strength was being extracted from my body, and the soul's voice of glorification was raised.

In the farthest depth of my soul there rose a light beyond description.

My intestines were truly ill. My belly continued to shrink and the voice of Yunus' glorification could still be heard. *"None has the right to be worshipped but You (O Allah), Glorified (and Exalted) are You [above all that (evil) they associate with You]. Truly, I have been of the wrong doers."*

I was traveling across all the warm and cold seas before my departure, to have a final look at the gulfs, rocks, fish, whales, water mosses, spume and salt.

I stopped by an island. The shrinking of my belly was about to destroy me.

I heard a voice coming from all directions, "*Had he not been of those who glorify Allah, he would certainly have stayed in its belly until the Day of Resurrection.*"

I opened my jaw and my ivory fangs opened because of pain and evacuated what was in my belly. I released the prisoner onto the island.

I knew the secret before my death. How cruel is knowledge?

I write down on the water.

I write with perfume.

My words sink within the sea and the blue sheet of water swallows my secret while I am writing ... I dream of being oil in hung candelabrums shaken by the wind like the waves.

Shake ...

Shake ...

The Blessed Cow of the Children of Israel

﴾And (remember) when Musa (Moses) said to his people, 'Verily, Allah commands you that you slaughter a cow.' They said, 'Do you make fun of us?' He said, 'I take Allah's refuge from being among al-jahilin (The ignorant or the foolish persons).'﴿

(Al-Baqarah: 6-7)

There is a kind of submission and tranquility in my wide eyes that never changes throughout the different circumstances that face me. My eyes remain calm regardless of the existence of enough food, water and work. Circumstances, deeds and words change, however my eyes remain unchangeable. It is true that people's eyes change whenever their mood changes. Perhaps the steadiness of my eyes implies that I never become nervous or agitated. For example, whenever a boring fly stands upon my back I become nervous, wagging my tail back and forth in an attempt to get rid of it. But if such a mean fly remains immovable in its place, I stop wagging my tail, surrendering and yielding at last with pleasure.

As I am like this with flies, you can imagine my attitude towards a human being with whom I could never be nervous.

Sometimes, I am afraid of being beaten by him. Therefore, I surrender to my fears. How marvelous is such a life!

I am a cow, who is completely satisfied with her life. Allah created me as a grace dedicated to others. I do not know the time of my slaughtering. I know that thousands of cows are subject to slaughter. Inside us, there lurks a kind of happiness when we are slaughtered. At this time, we feel that we have reached our ultimate goal.

How great it is that we become nice food or clothing for the human beings. We feed, clothe and serve them. It is an example of the utmost generosity. The cow is a creature that is used only to giving. We know that man takes everything from us. Moreover, whatever he gives to us is intended to be restored again. He decides to feed us on beans and barley in order to make us fit and strong in body in the near future. Man affords nothing for the sake of Allah. He always accounts for everything. The matter is well counted and well known. However, we never get enraged at this. Irritability, according to our customs, is not allowed. Our ideal saying is summarized in the following, "Let us eat beans and live." While our slogan in this life is, "Yielding is the only way to find real life." That is what we have been taught and what we have inherited and that is what we know.

One day Satan addressed us saying, "If the cows revolt, there will be a turn in the life of human beings. Man exploits your efforts in the fields, uses your milk to make cheese, cream, butter and honey, then butchers and eats you. O cows, we have only one enemy and that is human beings. If you continue surrendering to him, you will never become developed. You

were born as cows and so you will be till you die ... Rebel ... Move ... Do something."

We heard the words of Satan, then one of the cows addressed her fellow saying, "O my friend, you were talking about the beans you have eaten from the new field, how is their taste? Is it different from that of the old field?"

Satan said, "Move ... Stop talking about food and stage a revolution."

The cow said, "O my friend, both of them taste the same."

Satan went off desperately, mumbling words about cows and human beings but we could not understand what he said.

After he left one of the cows asked, "Who was here?"

Another fellow answered, "Someone we do not know." Another cow said, "Did he say anything?"

Another one answered her, "He was nervous. He said something that I could not remember." As cows do not remember any thing. As if words enter their right ear just to pass through the left one. We have big heads that do not include any troubles, problems or sorrows and that is why we live for a long time. A day for a man is a whole year for us, full of all kinds of happiness, pleasure, beans and satisfaction.

I lived among the children of Israel. I was owned by an orphan. In fact, I was an unusual cow, so beautiful when compared to other cows. I was a bright yellow cow and pleasing to the beholders. There was no other color on my body. I was neither too old, nor too young but middling (between the two). I was so nice and rare to be found among other cows.

Now, I want to speak about the children of Israel who were causing a state of astonishment among us cows. Whenever you hear their words, you believe them. Then you come to find a contradiction between their words and their deeds. They speak nicely to each other, and after that they go in different directions and you find those nice words turned to be very bad.

I have heard, of course, about our master Musa (Moses). He was their noble Prophet and the one who spoke with Allah. I did not see him but I did hear about him. I heard strange and contradictory words. For sure, those who love him among the children of Israel are very small in number compared with those who hate him. This is normal.

Musa came with the truth that is heavier than lead for the aggressors. I am not nervous and I am not going to say it loudly. I am so satisfied while I am saying it. I do not oppose what they are doing. For sure, they are free to do whatever they want with themselves. I only mind my own business until the day of my death. It is in butchering that the greatness of cows exists.

"It was a warm and sunny day." I always hear such an expression. I can understand what is meant by warmth. The meaning of cleanliness is clearly understood by me. Unlike buffaloes, cows do not drink muddy or dirty water or sleep upon wet or unclean beds. We adore cleanliness and refuse anything else. However, I cannot apprehend what is meant by the sun. I heard people talking much about some expressions such as "A sunny day," "The heat of the sun" and "The sun rises and the sun sets" but I have never seen the sun throughout my whole life. Sometimes I feel some kind of heat penetrating my whole body, which makes me sweat. Is this the sun? I do not know.

It is said that the sun is in the sky and such words make the matter even more complex because I do not know where the sky is. It is well known that cows can look at what is in front of them, at their left or their right but never at what is up. This is the same for all animals. No cow looks up and contemplates the sun, if there is really a sun. Anyway if the existence of the sun is uncertain, there remains one thing that is absolutely certain and that is the existence of beans. In the morning, I eat a large amount of beans, swallowing them quickly to save time and effort and to ensure devouring the largest possible amount. After that, I lie down upon my belly ruminating over what I have eaten in the morning.

Gig ... Gig ... Gig.

This is the sound of mastication in my mouth. Mastication is the utmost pleasure. Swallowing is even more delightful. While I was eating, the ground was clean, the dust was humid, the shadow was extended and tranquility was quite perfect.

Suddenly there was a loud cry. I turned my head slowly. We cows are not easily shaken or excited. No longer had the echo of the first cry ended than we heard another one. Then the whole village was full of cries. "Ilya'il was murdered ... He was the richest one among the children of Israel." I do not know whether his name was Ilya'il or Benjamin or Shu`uraym.

He had a very difficult name to memorize. Anyway, that did not bother us and had nothing to do with us. So why should we be interested in it?

That night, we were unable to sleep because of the great noise made by people. The family of the killed man tried to have the murderer punished but they were not able to determine who

he was. It seemed that the killed man had occupied a prominent place among the children of Israel and that the ambiguity that surrounded his murder was meant to bring something like an uproar. People decided to resort to the prophet of Allah, Musa for help. One of the cows asked me, "Did the people of the village go to Musa?"

"Yes," I replied.

Two days passed, and then she asked me on the third day, "What did Musa say?"

"I do not know," was her answer.

We said, "Let us ask any one else."

We asked a cow we met in the field, "What did Musa say?"

She said, "I will ask about this matter for you."

After two days, during which we did not remember anything about the matter, by chance we met the cow we had asked before, "What did Musa say?" we asked her.

She said, "I forgot to ask about that."

Then we forgot the whole matter. After that, we heard people talking about it again. We know from them that Musa said to his people, *"Allah commands you to slay a cow."* Then we realized that the matter was related to us. This fact aroused our interest, which is different from agitation. To be interested in something is allowed according to our customs, but we are not allowed to become agitated. We asked, "Which cow did they slay?"

We were surprised, because they did not slay a cow. We asked, "How? Were not they told by Musa that Allah commanded them to slay a cow?" Again we were faced with a

surprise that the children of Israel said to Musa, *"Do you make fun of us?" He said. "I take Allah's refuge from being among aj-jahilin (The ignorant or the foolish persons)."*

How audacious they are to do this with the prophet of Allah! He commanded them to slay a cow and so it was a must for them to slay the first cow they saw. However, because of their stubbornness they started negotiating. They falsely accused Musa of making a mockery of them. If they were cows, they would not act in the same way.

Musa took refuge in Allah from being one of *al-Jahilin*, so as to mock at his people. He explained to them that the solution of such a case lurked in the butchering of a cow. The matter here was related to a miracle that cannot be measured with what appears normally and naturally in this life amongst people. There is no relation between butchering a cow and knowing the identity of a murderer in an ambiguous crime. Let the children of Israel hit the murderer with a part from the slaughtered cow. Someone was killed and a cow was slaughtered. If the children of Israel hit two dead bodies together, they would know the killer. The murderer would arise from his death to announce the name of his murderer. What is strange about this?

It is a miracle.

Yes. It is a miracle.

It transcends the limits of our logic and usual thinking and behavior.

But the life of the children of Israel was never subject to logical reasoning. On the contrary, miracles constituted the dominant law that governed their lives.

Musa struck the sea with his stick, dividing it into two parts so that the children of Israel could pass through it safely while Pharaoh and his soldiers were drowned. After such a miracle, the people should not be surprised if they faced another miracle.

If they were cows, they would not behave in the same way. I am about to be nervous but I am not allowed to do so.

The continuity of miracles in the situation of the cow should not strike anyone with wonder or amazement. But the children of Israel fit in with the proverb that goes, "A leopard does not change its spots." In fact, dealing with them bears no fruit. Moreover, it is extremely tiresome to make any kind of negotiation with them. They made their Prophet Musa cry his heart out, may Allah make their hearts bleed. I am saying so without being bad tempered. We do not become nervous, but we notice whatever we want without excitement.

Negotiations continued. The children of Israel said to Musa *"Call upon your Lord for us that He may make plain to us what it is!"* Musa asked His and Their Lord another time and came back to them with the answer, *"He says, 'Verily, it is a cow neither too old nor too young, but (it is) between the two conditions, so do what you are commanded."*

The words here are quite clear. The cow required is neither too old nor too young but middling between the two. So, it was obligatory on their part to slay a cow that fitted this description. But they were the children of Israel, who used to disobey orders. They went to Musa in the beginning to find a solution to this case and to know the identity of the murderer, however, they went on delaying the appearance of the sun of truth by their

importunity and pride. They said, *"Call upon your Lord for us to make plain to us its color."*

This is most strange. We would not resort to people rather we would consult cows, "O cows, is it acceptable? Is it sound? What is the value that lurks behind knowing the color of the cow? All cows are the same in the sight of anyone. No one is interested in the color of a cow. What is the most urgent need that makes Musa go to Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He) to ask Him about the color of the cow?"

Moreover, look at the way they addressed him. They said, *"Call upon your lord."* It is as if He is the Lord of Musa only and not theirs. They seemed to be disclaiming their worship of Allah. Nothing could be more haughty or disobedient than this. In spite of being hot-tempered, the patient and generous Musa went on to get answers from Allah to their useless questions.

He was highly enraged when he came back from the place appointed by Allah and found his people worshiping a calf. Musa lost his patience and threw the Tablets. He did so out of what he had seen that could make any patient person unable to endure or to remain calm. Cows do not worship a calf, so how can man accept something of a lower status than cows by worshiping a calf? They worshiped the husband of us! Nonetheless, Musa went to ask His Lord and asked about the color of the cow.

Allah told him, *"It is a yellow cow, bright in its color, pleasing to the beholders."*

I thought that the matter was over. The matter of the cow had been completely investigated and they showed their

stubbornness, obstinacy and lack of politeness in the most complete form by deferring it too much.

The matter was studied most thoroughly and treated exhaustively. However, the children of Israel still disputed and remained stubborn. They said, *"Call upon your Lord for us that He may make plain to us what it is!"* After all that was said and all the previous descriptions, they did not know! How amazing!

My side is about to burst, my belly is about to explode and my liver is about to be torn in half.

Nevertheless, they addressed Musa saying, "Verily to us all cows are alike, and surely, if Allah wills, we will be guided." Musa, the patient and most mild-tempered one, went to ask His Lord and brought them the following answer. He said, "It is a cow neither trained to till the soil nor water the fields, sound, having no other color except bright yellow."

All these descriptions fitted me! What do you think the children of Israel would say?

They said, *"Now you have brought the truth."*

As if he had not brought the truth at first. I was about to lose my nature and myself and become nervous.

All the negotiations with the children of Israel over the cow were over ... I was the chosen cow.... I was about to fall into a deep state of rage. I was at the end of my tether! They drove me to an early grave because of their stubbornness and importunity. However, I went happily to the slaughter. I even wagged my tail.

Whenever I remember the children of Israel while they were negotiating with Prophet Musa and remember their stubbornness

and pride, I ask myself, "If this is their state while negotiating with their noble Prophet Musa, so how will be their state if they negotiate with anyone else?"

The Staff of Musa

﴾*And We inspired Musa (Moses) (saying), 'Throw your staff,' and behold! It swallowed up straight away all the falsehoods which they showed.*﴿

(Al-A`raf: 117)

Why is it that a garden is sometimes green and sometimes yellow?

Why is it that the deserts are dry and the mountaintops are covered with snow?

Why is it that the color of the sun is like fire when rising and like blood when setting?

Why is it that the moon turns from a beautiful full moon to a slim crescent?

There are so many 'whys' which I cannot find the answer for. All I know is that I was a plant, then I became an inanimate object and then I turned into an animal. I know that my last transformation, from an object to an animal, was one of Allah's great Miracles. To Musa I was only a staff but to Almighty Allah I was something totally different.

The staff of Musa, that is me.

I am the staff of Musa. I preceded the Prophet while walking ... I would raise high then fall down onto earth all the way along. I have no mind and I know nothing about "why" or "how".

At first the sun used to provide me with greenness and elasticity, but when I died it gave me strength and solidity, how amazing! Death is supposed to be the end of power and strength for all beings, but for me it was the opposite. I was only a branch of a tree and when I died I became stronger. So, you see that death means the ultimate end of power for some beings and a newborn power for others.

It is both simple and miraculous at the same time. When a branch of a tree dies, it is turned into a staff and a staff does not gain its solidity unless it is completely dead. That is how power is generated from death, the cessation of being, and this is only a modest sign of Allah's Omnipotence. I believe in Allah just like all the plants and all the inanimate objects do, though each of us glorifies Allah in his own special way.

So, it is me the staff of Musa! The most famous staff of all, chosen to be in the hands of Allah's Messenger to Pharaoh.

Anyway, I would rather start from the beginning.

First of all, I was a branch of a tree that was found in the royal garden of Pharaoh. Nobody could say that I belonged to him because we, trees, do not belong to human beings. We only belong to Allah Whom we glorify and worship. We are born from a seed whose father is the water and whose mother is the sun.

The sun! What a beautiful feeling of warmth! It is also wonderful to feel firmness when my roots dig their way down

into the soil to meet the cold water that gives me life. It is just great! My roots in the water and my head in the sun, a constant communication with the mother and the father ... what pleasure!

So many people think that we trees do not feel but this is not true because all beings feel. It is only man's vanity that makes him believe himself to be the only being who feels. The only difference between us is that we express our feelings through silence and greenness or through silence and non-greenness. We have special feelings and we have our very special ways to express such feelings. We do not have a will and we do not have the choice. We do not know evil and we do not know goodness. We are brought by Allah into being to perform a certain role without ever making mistakes or creating anything ourselves. To sum up, we are created to be obliged, but this in itself is a great blessing.

At the beginning of creation, Allah offered the trust; all the duties that He has ordained, to the heavens, the earth and the mountains but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it. As for man, out of his injustice to himself and his ignorance of this heavy responsibility, he agreed to bear it. Anyway, I thank Allah that I am one of those who were rescued from bearing this trust and this is a gain in itself.

Some people believe that all creatures other than man, are inferior to man because they are not honored by bearing this trust. To tell you the truth, I am not authorized to say whether this is right or wrong but all I know is that being created as a tree is the best thing that could have ever happened to me. Had I been a man, may Allah forbid, there would have been a probability that I could be a sinner. Surely, to be a staff is better

than to be a sinner. To be a staff rescued from Allah's Torment is better than to be a man enraging the Almighty. I thank Allah that I am a tree and it is enough for me to be submissive to Him all my life ... I cannot wish for anything better.

I came from Egypt, and I was meant to teach an Egyptian tyrant a lesson, but let us not go into this now.

I know that life is a big mystery. For instance, I do not know why I love the sun and water and why I bend with the wind. I do not know why I grow when I absorb water or why I die every winter and come back to life every spring. I do not know how other creatures feel when they move about on earth for I have never before tried walking. I told you, for me the whole universe is a mysterious secret, but I know that we glorify Allah and praise Him in our own special ways that will remain forever an unrevealed secret. Other creatures do not know how we glorify Allah and how we prostrate to Him in our own special way. Actually, when we do so, we feel great and I really do not know if this is how human beings feel or not.

Anyway, I was a branch of a tree in the royal garden of Pharaoh.

To tell you the truth, I never liked Pharaoh. I used to see him wandering in the garden. Sometimes he used to stand in my shade and I would hear him uttering words of blasphemy denying the existence of Almighty Allah. This enraged me and made me shiver with disgust. How come he would stand in my shade that is nothing but a blessing from Allah, and yet arrogantly deny the Giver of such a blessing!

I am not the only one, who would shudder when hearing words of ingratitude and heresy uttered by man, for all other creatures would do the same thing.

We, plants, have accepted to be tied down to earth and to be in a lower rank in the hierarchy of creatures, because freedom to us meant the probability of falling into sin and this we could not bear. But what about man; the being who was blessed with freedom and with the ability to choose and who has the potential to be the top of all creatures! How can he receive such blessings with denial and ingratitude! Do you realize now why I shuddered whenever Pharaoh would pass near my stem or would put his hand on me? And why I suffocated whenever his breath would blow near me?

I cannot say I hated Pharaoh because we, plants, do not know hatred. We know pain but hatred is not in our dictionary.

On the other hand, there were three people I used to like having them under my shade: the wife of Pharaoh, an Egyptian man from Pharaoh's relatives and a boy from Banu Isra'il. These three people used to gather under my shade and I used to feel satisfaction whenever they came near me. Maybe I liked them because they believed in Allah even though they never announced it. In the palace of Pharaoh no one was allowed to believe in any god but in Pharaoh himself. How arrogant he was! He was a tyrant who would not hesitate to do anything he pleased. Nothing could stop him. Killing was very easy for him. Despite all this, we trees never feared him. Yes, we would shiver with disgust from him, but we never feared him and we never feared to announce our faith in Allah, the One and Only.

Anyway, winter, the time of my death, was approaching. Imagine this, Pharaoh saw us dying every winter and coming back to life every spring and yet he completely denied the existence Of the Day of Judgment!

We, trees, offer a constant proof of the miracle of death and resurrection to all people but unfortunately few people realize the truth. Anyway, there were only three people in the palace of Pharaoh who realized this truth.

The number of believers was very few and this made us feel as if we were living in exile.

Winter came and with it came my death.

Trees die while standing. They lose their green color and their leaves fall to the ground. I felt my leaves leaving my branches and starting their journey in the air until they safely reached the earth. Actually, trees do not feel sad when they die, though they may give the impression of grief from the outside.

We, trees, do not see or hear or talk and in winter we glorify Allah and we prostrate to Him but it takes a longer time than usual.

The first days of winter passed smoothly, but one night a violent storm blew and there was thunder and lightening. I did not know what happened after this. All I knew was that a spark came down from heaven unto the garden of Pharaoh. It fell on my head and so I was split into two and I burnt. In this way, I fell down upon the earth. The rain then poured down extinguishing the fire that was kindled on my tips. Later on, when the storm was over, the destruction caused by my fall became clear. With my heavy weight, I almost destroyed half the trees in the royal garden of Pharaoh.

I also destroyed part of Pharaoh's temple where he used to retire and contemplate, though I could swear, if I am allowed to swear, that Pharaoh was too foolish to think or contemplate. He was fond of open areas and gardens and he would always give others the impression that he was in deep meditation. His arrogance fooled him into believing himself to be the wisest and most intelligent person on earth, but the truth was totally the opposite, for he was nothing but a tyrant wearing the mask of a clown. Being blinded with his own vanity, he was almost mindless and I used to wonder how he could think of himself as an intelligent being at all!

Pharaoh was not effective at all in ruling his people, and this system was under the control of Haman. His only concern was pursuing those who might dare to oppose him. In other words, Pharaoh was the one ruled not the only ruler as he allowed himself to think. It is something like mud that surrounds the roots. The roots believe themselves to be grasping the mud in order to attain their food and water, whereas the truth is that the mud is the thing that holds the roots and surrounds them and provides them with what it does not have.

Anyway, the ruling system of Pharaoh was mainly based upon subjugation and nonsense, just like any totalitarian regime that is built upon sanctifying the individual and denying the existence of Allah. Such regimes are nothing but gates to destruction and they always die out because of a catastrophe from heaven which represents Divine Justice.

Pharaoh was not a blind man, yet he lacked the power of mental perception, i.e. insight. He could not understand that this storm was only meant to be a warning for him from Allah. He

could not understand that Allah was too Merciful to punish him without sending him many warnings before. No, he was too foolish to understand this and he only thought this storm to be a coincidence. So with great indifference he gave his orders to uproot the destroyed trees, to replant the garden and to repair his temple.

Anyway, this was how I was moved from the royal garden of Pharaoh to a wood merchant. The latter was so happy to have me, for I was of the expensive kind of wood. So he dedicated his time to cutting and shaping me into idols and staffs. He then gave a group of those staffs as a gift to the royal palace.

So, after being a tree, which is one unit, I was split into a number of pieces; idols and staffs. Musa then came to acquire one of my staffs and this was how I became a staff in the hand of Musa.

Of course, to me the whole thing was different. First of all I was a tree, a living plant, then I became a staff, an inanimate object and this was not the same as before. In my new condition, I was given the power to hate Pharaoh and to hate his tyranny. Some may think that objects cannot feel, but this however is not true for they do feel but in their own special way. Yes, they may not grow or move, but inside they feel.

Thus, I became the staff of Musa.

Musa used to take me when going out because in the palace nobody was allowed to carry a staff except Pharaoh. The staff of Pharaoh was so distinguished. It was a short one made from black ebony and gold and it was adorned with jewels. Nevertheless, despite its ostentatious appearance, the staff of Pharaoh could not help feeling miserable.

Objects can feel happiness and misery. They are usually miserable when they are being used for purposes that contradict the natural laws of the universe that Allah prescribed.

I used to hear the staff of Pharaoh glorifying Allah and cursing Pharaoh whenever he uttered words of heresy or ingratitude towards Allah the Lord of the Worlds. Despite all this, and against its own will, this staff was the symbol of Pharaoh's power. Whenever he signaled with it, this would mean a royal decree coming in the way. For this reason, no one was permitted to hold a staff in the palace for who would dare to share power with Pharaoh?

So, Musa used to keep me in his room and whenever he went out, he would take me with him. At first, he used to forget me a lot for he was not used to carrying a staff at all. A staff, at that time, was only important to shepherds, old people and aristocrats and Musa did not belong to any of these groups. This explains why he sometimes used to forget me. One time, he forgot me at Harun's house and another time he forgot me with Pharaoh's wife who was like a second mother to him. He also forgot me once in the house of an old lady from Banu Isra'il whom he used to visit and each time they would carry me back to him.

Time passed, then one day there came a man running, from the farthest end of the city. He said, "*O Musa (Moses)! Verily, the chiefs are taking counsel together about you, to kill you, so escape. Truly, I am to you of those who give sincere advice.*"

This was a warning to Musa, but at that time I could not understand why they were conspiring to kill him. Later on, I learnt that Musa had struck an Egyptian man with his fist and

had unintentionally killed him. There had been a quarrel between an Egyptian man and a man from among Musa's people. The latter asked for Musa's help and so he interfered but without ever meaning to kill the other man.

Anyway, the Egyptian man fell dead and the story spread throughout the country. It was known to be an unintentional killing, yet there was a new factor that influenced the whole case.

Musa never worshiped Pharaoh and he never worshiped the multi-gods of the Egyptians and most important of all, he was from Banu Isra'il. There was a prophecy that said that one day, a man from Banu Isra'il would come and be the cause of destroying Pharaoh. Pharaoh believed himself to be Egypt and so he considered that any threat to him would be a threat to Egypt as a whole.

As a matter of fact, that incident brought the old prophecy into the minds of Pharaoh and his men, who were eagerly waiting for the chance to kill Musa. They thought that by doing so they would be preserving the country's security and this was the reason they gave for the decision to kill Musa.

At that time of his life, Musa was worshiping Allah in secret. He never discussed this matter with Pharaoh and yet in spite of this, he was still sentenced to death. At this point, Almighty Allah sent this good man to Musa who was from Pharaoh's people. He came running to warn him about their evil intentions. On hearing this, Musa snatched me quickly and quickly escaped from Pharaoh's palace. His main concern at that time was to leave Egypt.

For a very long time, Musa kept on walking.

While walking, I always preceded him; one step for me and two steps for him. Night fell and Musa stopped to rest in the middle of a dreary desert.

I felt that Musa was relieved that I was with him, for I could serve him as a means of defense. Anyway, he put me on his chest and he slept on the ground.

Musa was so frightened and worried when he was leaving Egypt and so he prayed Allah to save him from the polytheists and he was actually granted his wish. He traveled a long distance from Egypt then he slept for a while in the desert. The hot sun soon woke him up and so once again he started his journey.

Again, one step for me and two steps for Musa.

While walking, I discovered that I had many uses. I was a staff, a tent and a means for defense. I could feel it whenever Musa felt tired, for his sweat would fall on my rough wooden skin. Anyway, when he was tired, he used to stop, take off his cloak, stick me in the ground and then hang his cloak over me and sit under the shade. So, when I was a branch in a tree, I was able to grant people shade and despite my death and my transformation, I could still grant them the same privilege.

For days we kept on walking. Sometimes Musa would stop to eat from the trees and sometimes he would stop to drink from an old well.

Finally, we reached a wooded village that was surrounded by green pastures. When I saw this village, I remembered my past life and I could not help glorifying Allah Who has created everything on the earth from the dust of earth itself.

To tell you the truth, I could not figure out how dust could be the origin of everything on earth. How could it be the origin of wood, granite and jewels for instance?

How could the surface of a garden be green, and then be the bottom of a river and then be turned into rocks? It is really amazing. For us trees it is a mysterious puzzle but I do not know if it is the same thing for human beings or not.

Anyway, this village was called Madyan. When we reached Madyan, Musa helped two women to water their flocks. He then left them and headed towards the shade where he sat thinking about his past and present life. I heard him then say, "*My Lord! Truly, I am in need of whatever good that You bestow on me!*"

I could not actually understand his prayer but it appeared to me most likely that it was his own way of prostration as a human being. It is really a big mystery, the way different creatures prostrate to Allah; the birds, the bees, the flowers, the clouds, the thunder, the lightening, the Jinn and the human beings ... "*Of each one He (Allah) knows indeed his Salat (prayer) and his glorification.*" So, every creature glorifies Allah in the way Allah has taught him.

An hour later, one of the two women whom Musa had helped, came to him walking shyly and said to him, "*Verily, my father calls you that he may reward you for having watered (our flocks) for us.*"

So, Musa got up and went with her.

After a short distance, we entered a simple house that appeared to be the house of a shepherd. The man was so old yet he was so handsome. Musa sat in front of him, put me on the ground, and told him his story about Pharaoh and his men.

The man then said to Musa, "*Fear you not. You have escaped from the people who are Zalimun (polytheists, disbelievers, and wrong-doers).*"

In Madyan, Musa was so far from Egypt and from the tyranny of Pharaoh and so he realized that Allah had responded to his prayer. Musa thus praised Allah and thanked Him then he sat silently. A womanly voice was then heard in the room, as one of the two daughters was saying to her father, "*O my father! Hire him! Verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy.*"

This woman had never known Musa before, yet she praised him because she really felt him to be a good man. This of course made a good impression on Musa.

The old man then said to Musa, "*I intend to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years, but if you complete ten years, it will be (a favour) from you. But I intend not to place you under a difficulty. If Allah will, you will find me one of the righteous.*"

In reply to this offer Musa said, "*That (is settled) between me and you whichever of the two terms I fulfil, there will be no injustice to me, and Allah is Surety over what we say.*"

So, in a very short time the course of Musa's life was changed from a chased, frightened, lonely man, to a secure, safe and married man. So, Allah not only granted Musa his wish, but He has also bestowed upon him many other blessings.

Musa only wished to be rescued from the polytheists, but he was granted much more than this, for besides security and safety, he was also granted marriage and happiness. His wife had a very

good character and she was predestined to live with such a righteous man and be a very helpful wife for Musa in the end.

Anyway, Musa leaned me against the wall of his room and with my closed eyelids, I went on discovering the house we were in and I found that it was a house of very righteous people who believed in Allah and worshiped Him sincerely.

We spent ten years in Madyan.

Those ten years were a very good chance for Musa to think and contemplate the universe and its Lord. During this period, Musa worked as a shepherd for the old man, his father-in-law, and every morning we would go out early with the flock to the wide pastures. It was a great chance for us to enjoy the beauty of nature. Every morning we watched the rising sun and smelt the grass and the scented mountainous flowers. The sheep would run happily one after the other as if the breeze was tickling them to run and they would then stop to eat from the grass, then run on again. Musa would stretch his hand while holding me and point with me to the direction that could guarantee the flock food and safety. I used to watch the whole scene and glorify Almighty Allah Who has created all this beauty.

I could not understand how this outstanding scene had originally come from inside the earth and how it then came onto its surface then once more would vanish and return back to the earth. I knew that this is the normal cycle of all beings until the Day of Judgment would come and all would be resurrected from death.

At this thought, I could not help glorifying Allah. The idea made me shiver from fear and awe of Allah. Actually Musa too

had the opportunity to contemplate deeply and I used to notice him wondering at the perfection of Allah's Creation and glorifying Almighty Allah with great submission.

I remember that one day, a group of wolves dared to approach our flock, thinking Musa to be a weak, lonely man with nothing in his hand but a staff. However, when they came near, Musa moved me strongly in the air causing the air to whisper and I recall touching the back of one of the wolves causing him to howl out in pain. Anyway, they all ran away escaping Musa's staff.

Yes, a staff of a shepherd is not just a staff for directing the flock, for it is sometimes a tent and sometimes a very effective weapon for defense.

The days passed smoothly and everyday Musa would learn more about Allah and would come to fear and glorify Him more. Despite my wooden nature, I was able to feel the warmth of his body whenever he would remember Allah and His blessings. I could swear that this energy inside his body was sometimes greater than the energy of the sun itself.

This was how Musa spent ten years in Madyan.

Those ten years actually acted like the rough stones that are used in polishing mirrors and the weapons. Musa was totally refined from all the impurities of life and was ready to grasp the full picture of the truth. At this stage, he felt a deep yearning inside him to leave.

So, Musa went to his father-in-law and told him how he felt.

Musa said, "The ten years have passed."

The old man said, "Yes, Musa."

Musa said, "I would like to return to Egypt."

The old man trembled and said, "It is your right but I shall miss you a lot."

Musa smiled and said, "I shall miss you too. I owe you a lot. You gave me shelter and you allowed me to marry your daughter and you have been like a father to me but there is something inside me that calls me to leave. I do not know exactly what it is but all I know is that I do not have a choice."

Musa's wife said, "There are many dangers in travelling."

Her father said, "Do not be afraid, a long time has passed and he will be safe in Egypt."

Musa frowned and said, "To tell you the truth, there is no law in Egypt but Pharaoh himself. He can do whatever he wants without restriction, but this is not what I am thinking of."

The old man said to his daughter, "Get Musa a cup of milk."

He then turned to Musa and said, "What are you thinking of?"

Musa said, "Leaving is inevitable. I feel I am not free to choose, I am ordered to leave. I have seen myself in a vision, walking in the desert of Sinai heading back to Egypt and it appeared to be an order."

The old man said, "When will you leave?

Musa said, "Tomorrow if Allah wills."

Musa then drank the milk and his wife went to prepare their belongings. She put all her clothes and her husband's in a pile

and put with them plenty of food and many pots and then stood wondering what she might have forgotten.

On seeing this huge pile, Musa said to his wife, "What is this?"

She said, "It is our clothes, pots and cups."

He said, "We shall not take any of these things. Leave everything to your father. We shall only take the clothes we are wearing and one cup to drink water in."

His wife said, "How can I meet your people with the clothes I will be travelling in?"

Musa smiled and allowed her to take another dress. He then went out to the pastures at night and stood watching the sky and the stars.

In the morning, Musa's journey started.

We, Musa, his wife and myself, walked for a very long distance. I always preceded them. We passed by green pastures, then by a muddy road, and then by a dusty way. We walked near a little stream, then we passed by the big well that was found at the entrance of Madyan. After this, we went out onto a broad desert and here nature wore a different mask, for the earth then turned to be rough and rocky. We walked for two days.

At first when we started our journey, the weather was cold but when we approached the mountains, the weather became chilly.

We kept on walking for a whole week.

As a matter of fact, I felt that something was changing inside me but I did not know what it was. There was something

mysterious and confusing going on inside myself; something I could never ever express.

Anyway, we walked for days in that fierce weather and one night the moon vanished behind some dark clouds, lightening sparked in the sky, thunder grumbled loudly and the rain started pouring down.

Suddenly, I found myself shaking.

Musa was trembling from the cold. It was a deep-black night. He turned his head and could not see anything, and then suddenly he saw something. He saw a bright fire in the distance and so he said to his wife, "*Wait! Verily, I have seen a fire, perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire.*"

Musa then hurried towards the fire. He took me with him and I preceded him while walking.

Suddenly, something sparkled inside me like lightening. Only then I realized my real identity. I was not a staff and I was not a branch of a tree. I was not a plant. It was only a mask covering my reality. In fact, I was something totally different.

I was a serpent, a huge snake!

I do not know from where this snake came or why it was taking the shape of a staff. My amazement increased when we were approaching the Divine Presence.

I swear I was about to melt in front of the Lord of the Worlds and for the first time I learnt my true reality.

Anyway, Musa came near the fire and then he was called by name, "O Musa!"

I had been called before Musa.

I was called with no voice and no words. I was just ordered to be my real self.

When we approached the fire, I realized before Musa that what we were approaching was light, not fire. Before he was commanded to throw me, I was destined to know my truth.

I knew that I was a manifest serpent and a quick-moving snake. I realized for the first time that I had a much bigger role on earth than to be just a staff or a mere branch in a tree.

Musa approached the fire.

Suddenly the whole atmosphere changed. Before it had been severely cold and rain was falling heavily, but in this valley we did not feel any cold or any wind blowing. There was a great and solemn silence all over the place.

Musa came near the fire and here the earth became submissive to the Great Call, "*O Musa! Verily! I am your Lord! So take off your shoes, you are in the sacred valley, Tuwa. And I have chosen you. So listen to that which is inspired to you. Verily! I am Allah! La ilaha illa Ana (none has the right to be worshipped but I), so worship Me, and perform As Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat) for My Remembrance. Verily, the Hour is coming and My Will is to keep it hidden that every person may be rewarded for that which he strives. Therefore, let not the one who believes not therein (i.e. in the Day of Resurrection, Reckoning, Paradise and Hell, etc.), but follows his own lusts, divert you therefrom, lest you perish.*"

It was an extremely exalted situation more than words can describe. Musa's body trembled while he was taking off his shoes and I was shaking in his hands.

This invisible Greatness overwhelmed the whole valley and the Light was too strong for Musa to see and so he put his hands over his eyes for fear of being blinded by this extraordinary Light.

Allah was addressing Musa from behind a veil and I too received the command of knowing my reality from behind a veil. It is beyond the creatures' power to endure seeing Allah or listening to Him without a veil. Trees, mountains, the heavens, the earth and all other creatures would collapse to dust if this happened. So Allah in His mercy talked to Musa from behind a veil.

Musa stood in great submission before Allah. He was astonished when Allah asked him about what he was holding in his right hand.

Almighty Allah was asking Musa about me, what a great honor! He (Exalted and Glorified be He) knew my reality which had not yet been revealed to Musa.

It was the time for Musa to discover my real identity. Musa replied saying, "*This is my staff, whereon I lean, and wherewith I beat down branches for my sheep, and wherein I find other uses.*"

I listened to Musa's words and realized that he did not know what I really was, though we had lived with each other for almost sixteen years, five of which I was a branch in a tree in Egypt and one year as a staff that he hardly ever used, and ten years helping him and never leaving one another.

So, that was how Musa thought of me! A simple staff.

Anyway, Allah gave Musa His order to throw me saying, "*Cast it down, O Musa!*"

Musa obeyed and once he threw me from his hand, I started moving quickly and violently. At this very moment, my true identity was for the first time revealed. Although I never saw my image as a serpent, I was certain that I was a huge snake for I saw in Musa's eyes a kind of fear that I had never ever seen in his eyes before and I guessed that it was my appearance that caused him to be that frightened.

Musa was standing in the holy valley talking to Almighty Allah, however despite the greatness of the situation, Musa did not hesitate to run when he first saw me for he was terribly scared of me.

Musa wanted to run away from me! From his staff or let us say from his snake. I never felt any enmity towards Musa or towards any other creature. I was only a miracle and a mercy from Allah but it seemed that the mask I wore was terrible.

Anyway, Musa was terrified and so he ran away.

However, Allah said to him, "*Grasp it, and fear not, We shall return it to its former state.*"

Musa proceeded towards me and he grasped me with shaking hands. Once he did, I became so mild just like the staff he was used to holding before. Once again I listened to Allah addressing Musa who was holding me in his hand. Musa was of course shaken from all the incidents that had happened to him. He was being addressed by Almighty Allah and the staff he was holding was not really a staff. It was a difficult experience for him. I realized all this from the moment he grasped me for I could easily feel that he was trembling.

Knowing what was going on inside Musa, Allah wanted him to calm down and feel safe and peaceful. He said to him, "*And press your (right) hand to your (left) side, it will come forth white (and shining), without any disease as another sign.*" So, this was another miracle but this time it was a miracle from Musa's body himself not from any other external object.

Musa was stunned to see his hand shining white like the moon.

This miracle amazed him as well. However he endured it because Allah fortified his heart and helped him to remain calm. Almighty Allah told Musa that those were two of His greatest Signs. Then He gave Musa His Order saying, "*Go to Pharaoh! Verily, he has transgressed (all bounds in disbelief and disobedience, and has behaved as an arrogant, and as a tyrant).*"

It was only when Allah gave Musa His Divine Command to go to Pharaoh, that I realized the secret behind my being a serpent. I realized that Pharaoh was my ultimate end. Musa was supposed to talk leniently at first with Pharaoh, but if Pharaoh refused to listen, then it would be my turn to give Pharaoh a tough lesson.

So, I was supposed to come at the end of the stage of leniency.

A snake's skin, despite the shiver of fear it causes, is still so smooth. I knew that I was not destined to eat Pharaoh or harm him, I was only meant to frighten him. See how Merciful and Patient Allah is with His Servants!

This Divine Patience is much greater than man's power to imagine. I knew that as a staff I was able to bite Pharaoh once

and kill him. I knew that as a serpent I was able to twist around him and crush his bones, or even swallow him at once before any one could reach him. I knew I was able to do this, however, I was only commanded to be transformed in front of Pharaoh from a staff to a serpent in order to make him believe in Allah. What great Divine Patience!

Anyway, when Musa became calm again, he prayed to Allah, *"O my Lord! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness). And ease my task for me. And make loose the knot (the defect) from my tongue, (i.e. remove the incorrectness from my speech) [That occurred as a result of a brand of fire which Musa (Moses) put in his mouth when he was an infant]. That they understand my speech. And appoint for me a helper from my family, Harun (Aaron), my brother. Increase my strength with him. And let him share my task (of conveying Allah's Message and Prophethood), that we may glorify You much. And remember You much, Verily! You are of us Ever a Well-Seer."*

Allah said, *"You are granted your request, O Musa! And indeed We conferred a favour on you another time (before)."*

So, Allah granted Musa his request and He reminded him of the previous blessings He had conferred upon him saying, *"When We inspired your mother with that which We inspired. Saying, 'Put him (the child) into the Tabut (a box or a case or a chest) and put it into the river (Nile), then the river shall cast it up on the bank, and there, an enemy of Mine and an enemy of his shall take him.' And I endued you with love from Me, in order that you may be brought up under My Eye. When your sister went and said, 'Shall I show you one who will nurse him?' So We restored you to your mother, that she might cool her eyes and she should not grieve. Then you did kill a*

man, but We saved you from great distress and tried you with a heavy trial. Then you stayed a number of years with the people of Madyan. Then you came here according to the fixed term which I ordained (for you), O Musa! And I have prepared you for Myself (for my Message)."

I realized from Allah's Speech to Musa that Musa was meant to be a great man and a great Prophet as well.

Thus, Almighty Allah created Musa for Himself.

I comprehended the significant task that he was destined to carry out and I understood that I was a tool for persuading Pharaoh of Musa's Prophethood. After Allah had finished talking to Musa, Musa returned to his family. He took them and started on his journey again towards Egypt. I walked on the earth just like a staff.

Egypt finally came in sight and here I remembered my childhood as a branch of a tree in this country. Musa walked beside the garden of Pharaoh, my place of birth, and I was so amazed to see that place again. It is true that creatures do change.

That place did not stimulate any feelings within me as it used to in my childhood. I felt I had no memories there and I also felt that I was playing a great role in the human scene. Anyway, my first identity and role became mingled with my second one and this only incited me to glorify Almighty Allah more.

Musa then visited his brother Harun and in one of the rooms of that simple house, he took him, putting me beside him, and related to him everything about the mission the three of us were assigned to perform with Pharaoh.

The three of us, Musa, Harun and me.

We entered the palace of Pharaoh and I noticed the great difference between that palace and the house of Musa and Harun. The house of Musa and Harun was built of clay, whereas the palace of Pharaoh was made of stones covered with scented wood and the floor was made of marble and the furniture was made of marble, ebony and gold. Everything in that palace was shining and glittering except Pharaoh's face. The expression on his face was so cold, cruel and indifferent and here I realized why I was sent to him.

Pharaoh said, "Finally Musa."

Musa said, "Yes, I have finally returned and I have brought you the goodness of this worldly life and the Hereafter."

The expression on Pharaoh's face changed from cruelty and coldness to astonishment and amazement and with suppressed sarcasm he said, "How come that you bring me the goodness of life and the Afterlife? What is all this generosity? And from where did you receive all this goodness?"

Musa said leniently, "I have received it from Allah and I came to you as His Messenger to call you to worship Him."

Pharaoh stood up, walked for a while and then said, "You have never believed in me Musa. You have never believed in me as a god and you have always denied my divinity."

Pharaoh then walked before the throne and stood contemplating for a while then said, "Do you not believe that I am a god?"

Musa said, "I believe in the Lord of the Worlds."

Pharaoh examined Musa, "And who is the Lord of the Worlds?"

Musa said, "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything that is between them if you seek to be convinced with certainty."

Pharaoh then turned to the people around him and with deep sarcasm he said, *"Do you not hear (what he says)?"*

Of course his question was ironic and was addressed to his ministers, as he wanted them to witness the daring attitude of Musa who came to offer him faith in Allah the One and Only.

Musa, disregarding Pharaoh's sarcasm, again said, *"Your Lord and the Lord of your ancient fathers."*

Here Pharaoh failed to maintain his calm temper and so he said loudly, *"Your Messenger who has been sent to you is a madman."*

Silence prevailed all over the place the moment Pharaoh accused Musa of being mad. It was a very hurtful accusation, first because it was obviously false and second because it undermined the power of understanding of all the attendants.

Haman then proceeded forward bowing to Pharaoh and said, "Would you like me to give my men the order to kick Musa out of the palace?

Thrilled with Haman's hypocrisy, Pharaoh said, "No, we have not heard all his words yet. Musa is calling me to believe in Allah the One and Only and I am simply rejecting his proposal. Do you have any other thing to add Musa?"

Musa said, "Not much. I just want to draw your attention to Allah's Signs in the universe. O Pharaoh, Allah has created everything in this universe. Can any human being cause the

clouds to move or the rain to fall? Can any tyrant cause the plants to come out of the earth? Allah has created us from earth and we will be returned to earth when we die and then we will be resurrected from the earth."

After listening for a long time, Pharaoh said with boredom obvious on his face, "This is another case Musa. Let us not talk about this and let us see your own case."

Musa said, "What case?"

Pharaoh said, "There are a lot of cases against you and I think the most simple is your killing an Egyptian man and your escape from Egypt. What is the name of such a crime in law?"

Haman said, "It is called resisting authority."

Turning to Haman, Pharaoh asked, "What is the penalty for the one who worships a god other than me?"

Haman said, "Imprisonment for life."

Pharaoh then walked towards Musa and said, *"If you choose an ilah (god) other than me, I will certainly put you among the prisoners."*

Musa said, *"Even if I bring you something manifest and convincing?"*

It was an obvious challenge for Pharaoh and it was enough to make him believe in Musa's sincerity, however Pharaoh went on with his arrogance and cried out saying, *"Bring it forth if you are of the truthful."*

Musa then retreated two steps backward and then he threw me, the staff, from his hand onto the marble floor.

Pharaoh thought that Musa was retreating because he was confused and frightened and that was why his staff had fallen from him. At that thought, Pharaoh smiled confidently.

Anyway, that confident smile vanished once I touched the floor, for I was turned into a manifest snake and I started twisting and opening my mouth and sticking out my tongue.

Pharaoh was frozen in his place. His expression was something that had never been seen before. He was stunned and he kept on staring at me as his face was sometimes yellow and sometimes green because of terror.

He wanted to speak, but his tongue was paralyzed in his mouth. Deep silence overwhelmed the whole place and no voice was heard except my terrifying hissing.

All the attendants were frozen in their places out of great terror. Haman was the first one to recover and he quickly tried to call the guards but I turned to him and looked at him with my ever-opened eyes and stuck out my slim black tongue towards him and so he remained silent.

All the attendants kept on staring at me until Musa interfered and held me in his hand and so once again I returned to be a staff.

Once I had returned to my former solid state, Pharaoh was finally able to talk. All he could say was, "O, you ... " He could not say anything else.

When he recovered, Haman said, "O my master Pharaoh, this is only a trick of a magician and in Egypt we have many magicians who can do the same trick."

Musa moved towards Pharaoh and said, "O Pharaoh, this is not a magician's trick, it is only a sign from Allah to you and here is another sign."

Musa then held his hand tight to his side and when he took it out, a great light came with it and fell onto the marble floor. Musa's hand was extraordinarily white and this was the second miracle meant to convince Pharaoh of Allah's Existence. So, I was the first sign of Musa and his whitened hand was the second sign.

I felt that Pharaoh's body was experiencing something new. It was about to submit to Allah's Greatness and prostrate to Him. Pharaoh was intelligent enough to know that what Musa had brought was a true sign of Allah's Existence, however his personal interests, once more, came to rule his mind and so he decided to enter into a conflict with Musa and he thought of killing him.

So, the two miracles proved to be useless with an arrogant and blind-hearted character like Pharaoh.

Pharaoh moved towards Musa and asked him, "What do you want from us?"

Musa said, "I want you to send Banu Isra'il with me and I want you to stop torturing them."

Haman said, "So, that is the conspiracy behind your magic Musa. Musa wants to get us out of our land with his magic."

Pharaoh said, "O Musa, the meeting is over. Go now and we shall contact you later."

Musa looked at Pharaoh then he turned around and left the palace heading to the house of his brother Harun. Musa sat down to have dinner with Harun.

Harun said, "Did you see the expression on Pharaoh's face when he saw the serpent?"

Musa said, "Well, I looked at his heart and it seemed too arrogant to submit to this great sign though it was very obvious that his face did."

Harun said, "What do you think he will do?"

Musa said, "He will provoke all the people against us."

For a while Harun kept silent then he suddenly grasped me and said to Musa, "Do you know that when I saw your staff many years ago I was about to ask you to give it to me, but something mysterious held my tongue."

They both kept silent for a while then Musa again said, "Haman convinced Pharaoh that we are two magicians and I believe that they will use the magicians against us."

Harun said, "If it is only a matter of stirring the magicians against us, then it will not be difficult. I am only afraid that Pharaoh will be devising a plan against us."

Musa said, "When Allah was talking to me He said 'Fear not, verily! I am with you both, hearing and seeing.' Now let us pray, for praying is much better than wasting our time in such calculations and anticipations."

Thus, Musa and Harun went to perform prayer and all night long they went on glorifying Almighty Allah.

The night passed and the next day Pharaoh sent his messengers to bring Musa.

So, we all went with Pharaoh's messengers, Musa, Harun and me.

This time the meeting was held in the big hall where Pharaoh had gathered all his ministers, his leaders and all the men of authority in the country.

The three of us entered the hall.

Musa was wearing a dress made of white wool and old shoes on his feet. Whereas Harun was wearing a better dress, yet a simple one. Both of them were not wearing golden bracelets that used to be worn by Pharaoh's men. Anyway, Pharaoh entered the hall wearing the best clothes and jewels he had and he seemed to be swollen with self-confidence.

Pharaoh was holding a staff in his hand which was made of pure gold with a beautiful ruby at its end. He pointed at Harun's clothes and said, "You came wearing the same clothes you were wearing yesterday!"

Harun bowed his head and hid a smile of sarcasm. Pharaoh then pointed at Musa and said, "Why then are not golden bracelets bestowed on him?"

Pharaoh only meant to say that Musa was a liar, for had he really been a Messenger from Allah, then why would Allah have left him as poor as he was.

Musa raised his head and with a frown on his face he said, "Pharaoh is making fun of my poor state. Well, let him know that richness and poverty are meant to be a trial for man."

Pharaoh said, "Listen Musa, we have thought about it and we have decided that you are simply a magician who came to take Banu Isra'il out of this country by your magic. Well, Banu Isra'il represent the working hands of this society and we own such power and losing them means a great loss for Egypt and so we are challenging you. Your "staff" trick is a very simple one, and so we shall bring you our magicians to prove that you are a liar. Set the date and the place you like Musa."

Musa said, *"Your appointed meeting is the day of the festival, and let the people assemble when the sun has risen (forenoon)."*

So Musa accepted Pharaoh's challenge and we left the palace after this.

The day of the festival then came.

Pharaoh had spread the news of this challenge between his magicians and Musa all over the country. Anyway, this day was the time of the plants resurrection from their death in winter.

This day reminded me of my past life as a branch of a tree when I used to rise from death with the coming of spring. My leaves would again be born on my branches announcing my resurrection in their beautiful green color.

So, the day set for the challenge was a sign in itself and had Pharaoh been a little bit intelligent, he would have realized the inevitability of Allah's Existence. But unfortunately, Pharaoh failed in reading this most obvious truth in the book of the universe and for that reason the "staff" was necessary for him.

Musa and Harun went alone on the date set between them and Pharaoh. Pharaoh, however, did not come alone, for he gathered all his leaders and soldiers who came before him and

took their places, and thousands of people came to watch that exciting event. Later on, the magicians arrived and the soldiers greeted them by raising their weapons and this was the soldiers' sign to the people to greet the magicians as well. On seeing the sign, the people did not hesitate to raise their voices saluting the magicians. Then, in the midst of this exciting atmosphere, the trumpets of the soldiers resounded in the air announcing the arrival of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh entered being carried on his throne.

Once he appeared, all his leaders, soldiers, the magicians and all the Egyptians prostrated to him except three, Musa and Harun and me. Being an inanimate object, I felt very proud of being more dignified than all those human beings who had accepted to humiliate themselves and prostrate to someone other than Almighty Allah.

Pharaoh then gave his order to the people to rise. Of course, he was furious to see the three of us standing, for this was an obvious sign of our rejection of the idea of his being a god. Anyway, Pharaoh then signalled to the magicians to come forth. On approaching Pharaoh, the magicians said, "What is your command for us Pharaoh?"

Pharaoh said, "Musa is saying that he has got a god other than me. He threw his staff onto the floor and it was turned to a snake. I realized that he was only challenging me with his magic and so I gathered you."

The chief of the magicians turned to Musa and said loudly, *"O Musa, either you throw first or we be the first to throw?"*

Musa said, *"Nay, throw you (first)."*

The magicians got ready to throw their ropes and their staffs and yelled out saying, *"By the might of Pharaoh, it is we who will certainly win!"*

Musa then said, *"Woe unto you! Invent not a lie against Allah, lest He should destroy you completely by a torment."*

The magicians then threw their ropes and staffs and suddenly the whole place became full of snakes. They bewitched the eyes of the people, and struck terror into them, and they displayed great magic. All the attendants were deceived into believing that those were real snakes.

Silence mingled with fear overwhelmed the whole place and the people could not turn their eyes away from the snake-like bodies that were twisting on the ground. Pharaoh stood smiling confidently, whereas Musa, at that moment, lost all his self-confidence.

Haman meant to shake Musa more and so he made a gesture and bowed to Pharaoh and then he greeted the magicians. The soldiers hailed and so consequently the people did the same thing. The people's hailing had a strong impression on Musa who was amazed at what he had seen and who conceived a fear within himself.

I felt Musa's fear for his hand was trembling when he came to hold me. Almighty Allah, however, calmed him by inspiring him with the following words *"Fear not! Surely, you will have the upper hand."*

I knew that what I had seen was only human magic and I knew that all those things twisting on the ground were not real snakes. I was the only real snake in that place despite my

external wooden appearance and despite their snake-like movements. The difference between a real snake and a magician's snake is that the latter neither eats nor drinks.

The painters in Pharaoh's palace used to draw bulls and cows on the walls of the temples. Such drawings actually used to be more beautiful than the real ones however nobody could ever eat them or get milk from them. This was exactly the same difference between a real snake and a magician's snake and I was surprised that Musa did not realize this and was frightened. Anyway, I prostrated to Allah's Mercy when He calmed Musa saying, *"Fear not! Surely, you will have the upper hand. And throw that which is in your right hand! It will swallow up that which they have made. That which they have made is only a magician's trick, and the magician will never be successful, no matter whatever amount (of skill) he may attain."*

So, Musa threw me from his hand and I was immediately transformed into a manifest snake and I suddenly discovered that I was hungry.

I was a hungry snake surrounded by moving ropes and staffs. Of course, I could not help swallowing up the nearest staff I could find. However, this only made me feel hungrier and so I devoured the rope that was twisting there and then I felt my hunger growing more. To tell you the truth, I was surprised to find myself feeling very hungry; it was as if I had not eaten for millions of years.

It seemed that my favourite meal was the magicians' staffs and ropes that were thrown in the yard and so I immediately pounced upon them.

The people kept on hailing when the magicians' staffs and ropes were made to move like snakes but as I was devouring these false snakes, I devoured the people's hailing with them. The people's voices could hardly be heard in the yard because of fear and amazement, and in few seconds I succeeded in eating everything.

So in few seconds, there was nothing left of the magicians' tools, and there was only me alone in the yard. Deep silence covered the place and not a word could be uttered. I then turned to the magicians themselves and crawled towards them. They were stunned and seemed unable to move.

Their chief then stood up and said, "What we have seen is not magic. It is a sign from Allah."

By these words, the magicians declared their defeat before Allah's Omnipotence. They knew better than anyone else that magic had certain limits but what they had seen had surpassed all the limits they knew and so the magicians were defeated and were returned disgraced.

Here the magicians fell down prostrate and they said, *"We believe in the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists). The Lord of Musa and Harun."*

On hearing the magicians' words, Pharaoh said angrily, *"You have believed in him (Musa) before I give you permission. Surely, this is a plot which you have plotted in the city to drive out its people, but you shall come to know. Surely, I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, then I will crucify you all."*

They said, *"Verily, we are returning to our Lord. And you take vengeance on us only because we believed in the Ayat (proofs,*

evidences, lessons, signs, etc.) of our Lord when they reached us! Our Lord! Pour out on us patience, and cause us to die as Muslims."

Pharaoh was in a rage when he heard the words of the magicians. His anger was instantly diverted from Musa to them. For him, the magicians' stance was much more provoking than Musa's boldness because they were his own magicians, they were part of his ruling system so how could they disappoint him in front of all these people!

Pharaoh could not stand the idea that people could ever worship a god other than himself and so he began to kill the believers and crucify them. He totally forgot that Divine Omnipotence was preparing for him an end that would fit his tyranny.

Drowning with his mouth full of water and salt.

That was the end of Pharaoh.

When Pharaoh refused, because of his arrogance and stubbornness, to submit to Divine Power, Allah inspired Musa to take the believers and leave Egypt. They were chased by Pharaoh and his soldiers and this caused Musa's companions to be frightened.

They said to Musa, "We are sure to be overtaken."

Musa however, said, *"Nay, verily! With me is my Lord, He will guide me."*

Allah then inspired Musa to strike the sea with his staff, me! When I came down on the sea, it parted and each separate part became like the huge, firm mass of a mountain. That was how Musa and his companions succeeded in crossing the sea.

Pharaoh was following them with his army. Musa wanted to strike the sea again with his staff so as to prevent Pharaoh from catching them but Allah ordered him not to do so saying, *"And leave the sea as it is (quiet and divided). Verily, They are a host to be drowned."*

So, had Musa struck the sea again with his staff, Pharaoh would have survived. But Allah wanted Musa to survive and wanted Pharaoh to drown. Thus when Pharaoh and his army reached the middle of the sea, the sea returned again to its former state and they were all drowned. While drowning, Pharaoh said, *"I believe that La ilaha illa (Huwa): (none has the right to be worshipped but) He, in Whom Banu Isra'il believe, and I am one of the Muslims (those who submit to Allah's Will)."*

However, Pharaoh's repentance was rejected and Jibril (peace be upon him) said, *"Now (you believe) while you refused to believe before and you were one of the Mufsidun (evil-doers, corrupts, etc.)."*

So, that was the end of a tyrant called Pharaoh and I was honored to have a share in putting an end to his tyranny.

Many years passed. I played no other significant roles. I returned to my former state; a simple staff.

Then, one day I fell from Musa (peace be upon him) as he was climbing down a mountain. Musa looked at me and found that I had fallen deep in a very far valley. I did not know why he left me there and had returned home without trying to get me back.

To tell you the truth, I felt a certain depression in my heart. I felt that Musa's end was approaching and I felt that our separation was only a sign of it.

That night the rain fell heavily and I learnt that Musa was dying as heavens wept over him. I stayed in my place and I was unable to overcome my sadness.

The years passed again, and Banu Isra'il tried to find me but thanks to Allah they failed. Maybe if they had found me, I would have been an affliction for them just as I had been for Pharaoh.

Anyway, I was transformed into dust and I returned back to the arms of the earth. I was a secret buried in the dust until Allah decided to tell my story in the Ever-Glorious Qur'an.

Sulayman's Hoopoe

﴿*Sulayman (Solomon) inspected the birds, and said, 'What is the matter that I see not the hoopoe? Or is he among the absentees? I will surely punish him with a severe torment, or slaughter him, unless he brings me a clear reason.'*﴾

(An-Naml: 20-21)

My name is Marhala. It is a nice name chosen by Hidan.

I am one of the masters of the wind, the clouds and the water. I fly throughout days and nights without being exhausted. I only see the land from my towering throne in the sky. The more I fly far away and rise, the more beauty I see.

My nice name is not less than my great ability to fly, and my supremacy to fly is not less than my ability to view. From my towering throne in the sky, I can determine the place of water. The army may pass by an extensive desert and the water may run out. Who will bring water to the soldiers, birds and beasts of brey? I am responsible for quenching their thirst.

I soar vertically until I rise above the clouds. Then I stop to contemplate and look sharply at the land. My eyes go beyond the sandy soil and penetrate the limestone. In a word, my eyes delve into the land. I usually use a cosmic ray to find water. If I find water, I descend vertically until I touch down and observe

the entire place. Then I point, using my beak, at the place that should be dug. At that time digging commences.

After digging the well, I get down into it to drink and to have a bath. I come out of the well and my plumage is wet. The entire army drinks after me.

I have no need to introduce myself to the reader! Of course, you have guessed that I am Sulayman's hoopoe. I know that I am more famous than the stars of the sky.

Almighty Allah has granted me colored plumage that is not possessed by other birds. The most beautiful peacock does not have my elegant plumage, or is able to fulfill a small part of my serious tasks. He is an inane creature. He is always proud of himself without justification.

But me, I am modest in spite of my great importance. Let me tell you a secret, sometimes I feel that I am more important than the commander in chief. This feeling has crossed my mind two or three times but I put it aside to avoid troubles and to opt for peace.

I admit that Sulayman is a king of high prestige. I do him a lot of favors. However, I confess that I really fear him. I have not talked about my risky tasks in his favor. I prefer to keep my most important achievements as a secret till the end. This is our traditional way as officials of the intelligence agency. We keep the most important piece of information until the end of our tale.

Yes! I am Marhala. Sulayman's hoopoe and the chief of the intelligence agency of his army. Actually, it is a heavy burden. I was chosen from among ten thousand hoopoes. Sulayman put all of us to the test and found me the most intelligent one among

them all because of my ability to keep information for a long period of time.

Anyway, I was chosen that day. It was an unforgettable day. I could not deny that I was full of pride. And, I could not deny that I felt the seriousness of this responsibility, as the safety of the entire army is a trust upon my neck that is crowned by a lovely crest with a distinctive, patterned, plumage bestowed by Allah, the Creator of all.

Troops do not move unless I give them the green light. I get the information that leads the army to victory. Without information, the mightiest army is like a blind giant that any baby can easily humiliate and defeat. Information equals the life of the entire army. It is the hidden hand behind victory as it constitutes an eye on the enemy and he who knows most about his enemy can easily triumph.

My task is to know ... and I always know. It is true that I work hard but I also play with renewed vigor. There is a difference between the time of work and that of leisure. I do my best in the time of work, which is dedicated only to Sulayman and his army. Afterwards, I have the right to have fun. Indeed, this is my legitimate right.

Nobody has the right to ask me where I was. I finished my work and I was playing. It is none of your business to know my place even if I was flirting with a pretty she-hoopoe or was sleeping on a tree or was drinking or eating! What do you want me to do as long as I completed my work perfectly? I am not as pretentious and affected as the lion. For what I detest the most is the person who finishes his work and goes home preoccupied with his sense of importance and deals with his wife as he deals

with his employees, with pride and arrogance. I regard this behavior as a sign of insanity and ignorance.

Work is work and play is play. You do not find a person who surely knows the importance of play, unless he comprehends the importance of work. The one who fails, undoubtedly suffers failure in all fields ... He suffers failure in both work and play. This is my firm belief that caused me many troubles and gathered many enemies against me.

I cannot deny that I have strong enemies. For example, the lion is one of my oldest enemies. He works as a commander of attack in Sulayman's army and under his authority there are many lions and tigers.

O Mr. lion, I know that you are a lion. You are strong. You are the king of all animals but whatever your status, you cannot soar far away as I do. I am a soaring bird, who guides you to the right direction, regulates your speed and determines your target. This disgusting animal named the lion enrages me whenever I remember him.

It became his habit to ask a malicious question whenever I was absent, "Where did the hoopoe go?"

Sometimes Sulayman heard the lion's words. This repulsive animal got used to roaring as if he talks to deaf persons. What a vulgar creature!

I know that he tries to embarrass me by all means. His hostility is not confined to telling Sulayman, the king, about my absence but he also intrudes on my privacy.

Once he asked me, "Why have you not married yet?"

I replied, "Mind your own business, please."

"It is just a question. Why are you angry?" he asked.

I said, "I am angry because it is a private matter. Would you like me to ask you why you have married?" He laughed in an ugly way that shook the tent we live in.

Thus, my disgust with him increased deeply. Why does he not take care of his own affairs and bathe? His repulsive smell causes rhinitis. Whenever I talk to him I turn my beak away of him.

One day Sulayman, the king, summoned me. I looked at the sun and I saw it had begun its journey to set. "The time of Sulayman's prayer approaches, so why does he summon me now? It should be that my work ends after awhile," I thought.

I went to him anxiously. I feared that unexpected summoning. I had no knowledge of the reason behind it, so I was trembling with fear. Here appears the valuable role of information and intelligence. I flew towards his palace. I knocked the crystal of the window. All Sulayman's windows are made of colored crystal and their frames are made of polished copper with silver inscriptions. Jinn dive into the depths of the seas to get the soft sand. Then they set fire to melt it in order to make from it different kinds of glass. Sulayman appeals to me. He is an honest Prophet and a venerable king. He knows how to choose his words and his clothes.

In my point of view, he has no defect but his sharp intelligence. Sometimes you talk to him and it seems that he reads your mind or reads between the lines. During such a dialogue between two unmatched and unequal persons, you have

to be defeated. I do not like to be defeated as I was created only to win.

Sulayman allowed me to enter. One of his wives was sitting near his feet. I bowed my head and said, "Peace be upon Sulayman; the Prophet, the king and the wise." I know that Sulayman likes these titles.

Sulayman said ironically, "Peace be upon the hoopoe who adores play more than his work."

Such ironic words embarrassed me before his wife. I bowed my head and spread my colored plumage in a fanlike form so the sunray was reflected upon the crown that Allah granted me, which is more beautiful than that of Sulayman made by the jinn. He understood the significance behind this action and smiled.

He said seriously, "You have not brought your weekly report for three weeks!"

"My great leader!" I said, "nothing new at all. The Jinn work hard and the soldiers work to the best of their ability. Everything in the kingdom is running smoothly, and I understood from your previous talk that there is no need to give you a report if everything is in order."

He frowned and said, "You did not understand my words. Why do you imagine that your work is confined to offering reports! It is a traditional method used by intelligence agencies. You have to give me the sense that you are active and aware of what is going on."

"Your Majesty," I said, "you told me previously that you are satisfied with my work."

"Marhala, you know that I have a soft spot for you and you know how much I love you! I am satisfied with your intelligence but not with your work. You have not provided me with an example of your intelligence for some time. Your work is simply ordinary."

I started to sweat and felt rather embarrassed. At that time I started to think of my love, Hidan.

It seemed as if Sulayman could read my mind as he said, "Do you know a she-hoopoe named Hidan?"

"Yes," I replied shyly.

"I heard that you intend to marry her," he observed.

I felt that Sulayman wanted to catch me, so I remained silent. I was sure that he knew my stance towards marriage.

He continued, "If you give your work half the effort you exert in play, you will achieve greatness." Then he winked at me indicating that I could go. I left anxiously. For a long time, I was deeply distracted between Sulayman and Hidan. She said to me, "You are always busy!" While Sulayman said, "You are always playing." It was impossible for me to know how to satisfy them both. Such a situation is the worst nightmare for a genius like me! I went to her.

She was coming out of the river after having a bath. As soon as she noticed me, she stretched out her left wing. I embraced her and put my head upon her chest and sighed with pleasure. Her beautiful plumage flew around her graceful neck.

She asked me with sleepy eyes, "I heard that Sulayman summoned you."

"I have just come," I admitted.

She said furiously, "If you give me half of the time you offer to your work, I will be the happiest she-hoopoe in all the world."

I said angrily, "Sulayman said the opposite of what you just said! He told me that love is an obstacle in the way of success."

She said kindly. "Sulayman lays the guilt and blame unjustly on you."

"No! Only you are unjust towards me," I said decisively.

She was near to tears and said, "You are always busy. You are always traveling or holding meetings with your subjects. You are either going to Sulayman or coming back from his palace. Where is my share? What is the destiny of our love?"

"O Hidan listen!" I said anxiously. "You are the most beautiful she-hoopoe in all the world and till the end of my life I will dream only of your beak. Your words have inspired me with a great idea. You said that I always travel. Well I have not traveled for a long time and this is the reason for my laziness. I will fly today towards the hills of Yemen. My heart says that I will find something new."

I soared into the air and flew away. I was astonished at the nature of women. Every she-hoopoe I had previously met was able to utter the same words spoken by Hidan. However, I was attracted to Hidan. "If she is less jealous," I thought, "I will marry her. I am afraid that jealousy corrupts my life."

How beautiful is the land below when I see it from my towering throne! The desert appears like a carpet of gold. The sea looks like a flowing dress of blue turquoise. The fields look

like green mansions. I feel Allah's Omnipotence when He, the Almighty, drives clouds to the colored mountaintops from where snow pours down like white kisses.

My heart surrendered to Almighty Allah and I praised Him during my flight. I went higher and higher without any feeling of tiredness.

After I had finished praising Allah, my eyes searched the land for water. Fortunately I found three virgin wells in a barren desert. I determined their places and increased my speed. It is surprising to fly without knowing the secrets of flying!

Finally, Sheba appeared with its white walls, wide roads, green fields and many palaces. There were many guards everywhere and a tremendous temple with no roof, having its court filled with sun's rays came to my view. After seeing the greatness of their kingdom, I concluded that they were rich and strong. Their roads were well paved and their housetops were clean and full of gorgeous flowers.

I chose a high tree in the greatest palace on which to rest. I saw a nice she-hoopoe. I greeted her with a slight bow and turned my face away. I started thinking of a way to make her reveal to me the secrets of this kingdom. It did not take me long to think of something, as my favorite hobby is talking and getting others to talk.

While I was grooming my beautiful plumage, I said to her, "Are there any rivers near this place?"

"Are you a stranger?" she asked curiously.

"I am a traveler on Allah's earth. The entire earth belongs to Almighty Allah, doesn't it?"

She was steadily approaching my branch and she said, "In our kingdom the earth is owned by the sun."

Using my good sense as an official of the intelligence agency, I concluded that there was a mysterious puzzle behind her saying this. So I approached her and said in a friendly way, "O gentle she-hoopoe, how can the sun own the earth?"

She was rather shocked at my question and answered frankly, "Here, people prostrate themselves before the sun."

I was surprised at her words. Sulayman's image crossed my mind. Finally I found a serious case that I had never even dreamed of before. "Here people prostrate themselves before the sun!" "Is it not the highest treason against the One true Creator of all! Is Sulayman not Allah's Prophet and His sword on the earth! This case is certainly under his jurisdiction," I thought.

I felt that I had encountered the happiest day of my life. A sense of overwhelming pleasure fell over me. I wanted to fly and cry for joy, stretch out and fold in my crown of plumage. But I controlled my emotions in my capacity as a veteran official of the intelligence agency.

I turned to her and murmured calmly with a sense of indifference, "Very nice ... Very nice."

The foolish she-hoopoe asked me, "What is it that you find nice about me?"

I complimented her saying, "Your way of speaking. I have traveled far and wide, and I have seen and known a lot, but I have never seen a she-hoopoe uttering words in such a gentle manner."

My dart hit its target. The branch on which she stood started to tremble. I saw her trying to stretch her wings out in a spontaneous manner as if she wanted to dust off her plumage. She wanted to show me her agility. "It is all right, she is good," I thought. Anyway, I was not in the proper mood to think of love.

"What is the next step?" I thought. I wanted to know a huge amount of information about the case, but I could not interrogate her directly or else her suspicions would arise. Our chat should seem normal and remain spontaneous, discussing the weather, trees, food or rivers.

I spread my colored plumage like a fan and flapped my wings to show her how charming and attractive I am.

She approached the branch on which I stood, coming closer and closer and said, "Why have you not told me about yourself? From where do you come? Where are you going? Do you have kids? What is your favorite food? What is your name? What is your birth date?"

She started to interrogate me! I decided to counterattack. I stretched out my right wing and struck the branch on which she was standing in a surprising and vigorous manner. She was about to lose her balance and fall but I caught her with my left wing. She was surprised to find herself standing beside me and her beak came near to mine.

If Sulayman had seen me, he would imagine that I was flirting. If Hidan had seen me, she would imagine that I was betraying her and she would cry her heart out. "No! This is not right," I thought. What I did was a part of our work and it became very easy to get information.

She told me about the population of that place, and the amount of soldiers and officers. She accompanied me to the armory of which I took a photograph with my eyes and kept it in my mind. She showed me the entrances and exits of the kingdom and the rivers from which she drinks. I saw the fields, industrial units and houses of the peasants. She took me to the temple of the sun in which the people of this kingdom prostrate themselves before the sun.

I saw a great disk of gold that was decorated with precious gems. The sunray was reflected upon that disk and its vivid flash nearly blinded one's eyes.

I do not deny that an unintentional laugh escaped from me while we were observing that temple. She looked at me surprisingly.

She also accompanied me to the queen's palace. The queen was so pretty. I have never seen such beauty at the palace of Sulayman. I observed that her clothes, which were draped behind her, covered her feet. I imagined that she was modest and decent but the she-hoopoe told me that there was a defect in one of her feet and that was why the queen concealed them.

She was unmarried. She had a strong character like that of men. I saw how she dealt with her leaders, ministers and consultants in a decisive manner.

Her only defect was her prostration before the sun. I saw her and her people prostrating themselves before it and I felt truly amazed as to how they could prostrate before something that was itself created by Allah.

Her throne was an example of great art. I recorded its full description in my mind.

I managed to get a sufficient amount of information throughout my five-day visit to the capital of the kingdom and its distant villages. I knew all about the length and width of its roads and their capacity to hold Sulayman's army, for I imagined that he might attack this kingdom.

Also I managed to recruit that nice she-hoopoe whom I met in Sheba without revealing my true character. She aroused some troubles at the very beginning when she noticed that my interest in Sheba was more than my interest in her but then I said to her, "I am a curious hoopoe; my favorite hobby is to ask questions."

Through my talk with her I concluded that none of the people in Sheba could understand the language of birds, beasts and animals like Sulayman. However, I did not reveal my true character or the nature of my mission. Who knows? It is better to take precautions.

After I had completed my mission in Sheba, I thought of having some fun. It was my right, wasn't it? There was no harm to have some fun especially after finishing my work. I told my companion and student, the she-hoopoe, "We want a place in the countryside with delicious worms and flowing rivers." She accompanied me to the banks of a beautiful, flowing river in the countryside.

I spent three days as if I was in a dream. I enjoyed absolute serenity, the magnificent countryside, general welfare and soothing tranquility. On the first day, I arranged the information that I had collected, in my mind and I spent another two days with the she-hoopoe.

Nothing rests the mind of a tired hoopoe like a nonsensical chat with a she-hoopoe.

She asked me, "Why do we not travel to Egypt? It is said that Egypt has beautiful countryside that is full of delicious worms and has many barns that are full of food."

"Egypt is so crowded," I answered, "hoopoes suffer from this population explosion, and I do not like crowds and noise."

I said that in order to dissuade her from going to Egypt.

One day she asked me, "Do you not think of marriage and having a stable family? What is there to dream of better than that?"

I did not tell her how busy I am. I did not tell her about my serious missions for Sulayman's army.

At the third day I remembered Sulayman and I said to myself, "What will happen if a jinni from Sulayman's army strolls by us and sees how I am playing and enjoying this rural summer resort? If he tells Sulayman, I will be slaughtered!"

Suddenly, I said to the she-hoopoe, "I will leave tomorrow."

"Take me with you," she asked.

"I wish I could," was my reply.

"Why?" she asked.

"I will come back again," I said, trying to comfort her.

She put her head on my chest and started to weep.

I said, "Your tears tear up my heart, but I have to leave and one day you will realize the reason. I have fallen in love with you but I have to leave."

She was desperate and violent and spoke as if she was threatening me, "If you are going to leave tomorrow, I will abstain from food and drink!"

"But if I do not leave tomorrow, Sulayman will kill me. You do not know him," I said, trying to persuade her.

"Who is Sulayman?" she asked.

I said, "He is my elder brother and my master. There is also a family problem that necessitates my travel. I want to leave while my mind is full of your smiling face. O my sweetheart, please smile!"

I could not sleep that night. At midnight, I left our warm bed amongst the branches and flew silently away.

"More height! More speed!" I commanded my wings.

Then I slept and flew in my sleep. Finally, I reached the tent of birds in Sulayman's army. All the animals were searching everywhere for me. No sooner had I entered the tent than dozens of birds approached me in a frightening manner and asked me, "Where were you? Where were you?"

I was worried when I saw the way they received me. I tried to claim some self-possession and said, "What happened? Why do you scream like this?"

"Sulayman inspected the army," they explained, "and after inspecting the Jinn and beasts, he came to our tent ..."

I called the sparrow, who was my secretary, and asked him, "What happened?"

He said, "Exactly, what they told you. Sulayman came to our tent and said, *'What is the matter that I see not the hoopoe? Or is he*

among the absentees? I will surely punish him with a severe torment, or slaughter him, unless he brings me a clear reason.'"

My body shook but I pretended stability and asked, "Did Sulayman state all these threats?"

"Exactly as we told you," explained the sparrow.

"What was your answer?" I asked him.

He said, "I wanted to say that you were on a mission but my beak was trembling out of fear so that I could not utter a word." "Do not be afraid!" I said to my secretary, "we are true. I was on a mission. What did my enemies say about me? How did they trade on the situation?"

"They spoke ill, trying to slander you," he said, "their words were like the poison of a snake. They said that you are kind and gentle but, after this word 'But' they attributed to you all the defects in the world. They accused you of slackness and negligence. O master, we are in a serious dilemma."

"Pay no heed ... I will handle it," I assured him.

I pretended to be very calm and confident and went for a stroll but soon I was about to swoon. I started trembling. I did not know how Sulayman would receive my story about Sheba. He might believe he or me might think that I had fabricated a tale to justify my absence.

Hidan came tearfully and her plumage was torn off. She threw herself at me and shouted, "Where were you? Sulayman threatens to slaughter you and he is very angry."

The situation was critical. My sweetheart was so frightened. I shouted at her to stop crying and she did.

I spoke to her arrogantly and said, "What does Sulayman think of me? This great king misunderstands me and imagines that I am having fun! I have an account to settle with him."

I proudly spread my colored plumage but in fact my heart was trembling within my chest.

Hidan felt tranquil when she saw my confidence.

I headed straight for Sulayman's palace in spite of my tiredness after the long journey. On my way towards his palace, conflicting feelings worried me. I was frightened, furious, desperate, hopeful, scared and brave all at the same time.

I was informed that Sulayman was eating and he gave an order not to be disturbed.

"Step aside!" I ordered, "I have not come to play or to have fun. I have urgent news for the king."

The guard did not understand my words, as nobody could understand our language except Sulayman. The honorable Prophet heard my angry words while he was eating. He ordered them to let me enter. I entered the dining room and stood far from his hand at the other part of the table.

I said to Sulayman while he had not yet left his fork, *"I have grasped (the knowledge of a thing) which you have not grasped and I have come to you from Sheba with true news."*

No sooner had I said these words to Sulayman than I felt that I went down in history. Who would dare to say to Sulayman "I have grasped the knowledge of something, which you have not grasped." Nobody would dare!

It is me who said these to Sulayman in a violent tone. This boldness was a result of my extreme despair and fear. The best way to defend is to attack. Allah, the Creator knows that I was trembling when I said these words to him.

Sulayman put his fork into the golden dish and bent down at the table. He looked at me with a surprised expression on his face.

While he was still in this state of amazement, I continued my speech, *"I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given all things that could be possessed by any ruler of the earth, and she has a great throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah, and Shaytan (Satan) has made their deeds fair-seeming to them, and has barred them from (Allah's) Way, so they have no guidance."*

At first, Sulayman was following my words in amazement, then in rage. But as he was so interested in my words, I realized that he was listening intently. I told myself that I should make use of this, so I proceeded to say, *"They have to worship (prostrate before) Allah, Who brings to light what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows what you conceal and what you reveal. None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Lord of the Supreme Throne!"*

This final statement had originally been used by Sulayman to call people to Almighty Allah. This was surely the proper context to quote this statement in my talking about Sheba.

I finished my talk and waited awhile.

Sulayman bowed his head, knitted his brows and started to think.

Silence spread over the whole place. My heartbeats increased to the extent that I imagined their sound would spread all over the huge hall. I imagined that they would move the walls from their places.

Finally, Sulayman raised his head and said, *"We shall see whether you speak the truth or you are (one) of the liars."*

I felt that my blood pressure had returned to its normal rate. I had temporarily escaped from danger. I proceeded to speak about my case. I reported to Sulayman all the information that I had received about the queen of Sheba. I told him about her great throne which was regarded as a golden masterpiece and about the temple of the sun in which they exercised their religious rituals. Also, I told him about the number of soldiers and their military preparations. In a word, I informed him of everything.

Sulayman ordered one of his servants to bring a sheet of paper and a pen. He wrote something then he placed it in an envelope and gave it to me. He said, *"Go you with this letter of mine, and deliver it to them, then draw back from them, and see what (answer) they return."*

I took the letter in my beak and prepared to leave. I ran my beak over the letter and said to Sulayman, "O master, the journey is too long and the currents of air may tear up the letter. I suppose it is better to put it inside a golden envelope."

Sulayman ordered the servant to make a golden envelope and ordered me to come and take it in the morning and then to fulfill my mission.

I had many hours to wait until the morning. I came proudly out of Sulayman's palace feeling that I had escaped from danger.

The sparrow, my secretary, asked me, "O master, what happened? I think that you have been saved from danger!"

My success had made me arrogant and I told him, "Stupid! Did you think that I was threatened? Go and mind your own business."

Hidan asked me with a look of yearning on her tired face, "What did Sulayman say to you and what did you say to him?"

I said calmly, "It was a top secret meeting that has nothing to do with you, so go and take care of your torn plumage."

I passed by all my enemies. I passed by all those who were filled with glee at my misfortune!

The lion, as usual, spoke ill of me trying to slander me when Sulayman desired to punish me with slaughter. When Sulayman left the bird's tent he had said, "It is quite true. This treacherous hoopoe deserves to be slaughtered."

My chance had come to return his evil!

He asked me in his vulgar and loud voice, "Marhala, where were you?"

"Since when do the leaders of the intelligence agency talk to their soldiers about their missions?" I told him haughtily. "You are a mean soldier. You are a puppet guided by another mind. Mind your own business and you will know where Marhala was when orders come to you."

I was swaggering proudly. I shut my mouth. Nobody knew what had happened between Sulayman and I. I let them exhaust their minds. I went about silently, surrounded by obscurity and danger. Remember I told you before that our job is tiresome.

The envelope was made and I took it and began my journey to Sheba.

I entered the queen's bedroom and stood on one of the ceiling's protruding inscriptions. Then I let the envelope fall onto her head.

Balqis, the queen of Sheba, woke up. Really, her eyes were so beautiful. Unfortunately she worshiped the sun. She read the letter and I could see how her heartbeats increased. Up till now, I did not know what Sulayman had written to her. She sounded a bell beside her bed and three servants came. She ordered an urgent meeting with the ministers and the members of parliament.

She was turning around searching for the one, who brought this letter. I hid near the ceiling so they would not notice me.

My friend the she-hoopoe entered the bedroom and she flew towards me and said sadly with tears in her eyes, "Marhala, where were you? I searched for you everywhere! What are you doing here in the queen's bedroom? Are you searching for me? Why did you come quickly? Did you solve your family problems?"

"Shut up! I have an urgent mission," I told her decisively.

She threw herself at me and kissed me. The queen watched us for a while and then she left to have her morning shower. It was clear that she was thinking deeply about Sulayman's letter.

I spent a couple of days in Sheba. Then I returned quickly and I found Sulayman inspecting his army.

"My great king," I said boldly, "could you stretch out your arm to me as I am extremely exhausted from the long journey?"

He stretched out his arm and asked me about the letter.

I told him that I had thrown it to the queen. I continued to tell him how she had summoned her ministers, the members of parliament and told them, *"O chiefs! Verily! Here is delivered to me a noble letter. Verily! It is from Sulayman (Solomon), and verily! It (reads), 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. Be you not exalted against me, but come to me as Muslims (true believers who submit to Allah with full submission)' O chiefs! Advise me in (this) case of mine. I decide no case till you are present with me. They said, 'We have great strength, and great ability for war, but it is for you to command; so think over what you will command.' She said, 'Verily! Kings, when they enter a town (country), they despoil it, and make the most honorable amongst its people low. And thus they do. But verily! I am going to send him a present, and see with what (answer) the messengers return.'"*

Sulayman asked me, "What are your observations concerning what happened?"

"I think that their consultation is a political ploy," I told him, "when she asked them about their opinion, they talked about their ability at war, then they finally authorized her to decide. They have neither opinion nor power. Furthermore, they imagined that they could bribe you!"

Sulayman laughed heartily and so I felt quite relieved.

The messengers of Balqis, the queen of Sheba, came with a precious present. I was the first one to know about their coming as the reconnaissance squads of hoopoes inform me of everything. These squads fly by day and night under my command. I divided the work among them to inform me about

the strangers in our honorable kingdom. They described the present and I told Sulayman while I was trying to resist my desire to laugh.

The messengers were proud of their present, thinking that it was priceless. However, that present meant nothing to us, and absolutely nothing to Sulayman. During these days I put myself on equal terms with Sulayman and I confess that this was a terrible matter.

Sulayman met Balqis' messengers while he was sitting on his throne surrounded by real lions as well as golden ones. One of the real lions yawned and Sulayman, using the lion's language, ordered him to stop. That lion was the ugly and disgusting one who loved to slander and bother me.

Sulayman asked him, "Where were you last night?"

I told Sulayman, "The lion was flirting with a new lioness that has recently joined the army."

The lion drew himself up, spread his chest and in a language of arrogance he roared.

The chief of the messengers of Balqis fainted from the sound of the lion's roar. That chief was an old man and he had never before seen a real lion.

Sulayman refused their present and told them that they would be mistaken if they tried to bribe him with gold. He pointed at the walls, the floor and the statues that were made of gold and said, "I want nothing but your surrender to Allah."

Sulayman threatened to conquer them. He always appealed to me because of the manner in which he utilized his power. He never exaggerated nor misused weak persons.

Let me mention Sulayman's statement to the chief of the messengers when he came to his senses, *"Will you help me in wealth? What Allah has given me is better than that which He has given you! Nay, you rejoice in your gift! Go back to them. We verily shall come to them with hosts that they cannot resist, and we shall drive them out from there in disgrace, and they will be abased."*

The queen's messengers left the palace while they were sweating from fear. And, Sulayman remained peacefully and confidently in his place.

Days passed. My life returned to normal, and my neck was saved and my words were proven true. The most complicated problem for the important hoopoes like me is that they are threatened with slaughter at anytime. It is usually the case that we either receive honor or Sulayman's sword, as there is no middle course. The most distinctive feature of those who are great is to live amidst danger at all times.

I know an ordinary hoopoe, who lives in absolute safety but no one even knows his name. But I am a famous hoopoe. I do not like to be proud of myself as Sulayman teaches us modesty. He usually says, "For sure, real greatness lurks in modesty. Glory belongs only to Almighty Allah, as He is the Most Omnipotent. As for perishing human beings, hoopoes, kings and dynasties - it is only Allah Who grants them status. If He withholds His provision, they will be lost forever. How can creatures be proud of their intelligence, wealth, power and rank! None of these things belong to anyone. They are restorable loans."

I must not be conceited, proud or arrogant.

Here I am, bowing my head, stretching out my wings and performing prayers. "Praise be to Allah for creating me as an

intelligent hoopoe and surely He was able to create me as a stupid one.

Praise be to Allah for creating me as an important hoopoe and He was surely able to create me as a vile one.

Praise be to Allah for creating me and surely He could have decided not to create me.

Praise be to Allah ... Glory be to Allah ... To Him belongs the dominion ... To Him belongs the judgment.

O my Lord, the entire case is about to reach its end so help and support me. I want to be a reason of making those people believe in You."

Sulayman was sitting on his throne surrounded by his ministers and the leaders of humans and jinn, birds and beasts.

He turned to me and suddenly asked me, "What draws your attention in Sheba?"

"The queen's throne and the people's feelings that they are developed and skillful at the arts of architecture, construction, industry and sculpture," I replied.

Sulayman paid no heed to me and went on observing his ministers, leaders and officers. Sometimes I cannot understand him. Sometimes his questions seem strange but only time reveals the great wisdom behind them.

He suddenly said, *"O chiefs! Which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me surrendering themselves in obedience? An `Ifrit (strong) from the jinn said, 'I will bring it to you before you rise from your place (council). And verily, I am indeed strong, and trustworthy for such work.' One with whom was knowledge of the*

Scripture said, 'I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye!' Then when [Sulayman (Solomon)] saw it placed before him, he said, 'This is by the Grace of my Lord to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful! And whoever is grateful, truly, his gratitude is for (the good of) his own self, and whoever is ungrateful, (he is ungrateful only for the loss of his own self). Certainly! My Lord is Rich (Free of all wants), Bountiful.'"

I saw what happened myself and I confess that I was truly amazed.

The throne of Balqis had a base of silver inlaid with gold! A chair of gold inlaid with silver! A wall of pure gold and silver on which the sun disk was depicted! All the gold and silver of Sheba was placed inside the throne. The throne was very heavy. It weighed the equivalent of about ten heavy trees. Its distance was as far as a fast hoopoe like me might take a day to reach.

In spite of all these facts, the throne was brought.

Sulayman asked his leaders to bring the queen's throne.

An `Ifrit from the jinn said that he would bring it before Sulayman leaves his council, which was about two hours.

One who had knowledge of the Scripture said that he would bring it within the twinkling of an eye! Within the twinkling of Sulayman's eye, the throne was brought!

I know that people will ask, "Who had knowledge of the Scripture? What was his name? How did he bring it? What kind of knowledge can offer such tremendous power?"

I think that these matters belong to Sulayman alone. The important point of this story is that there was a creature at

Sulayman's council who had such power. A creature that was neither a Prophet nor an angel. He was the one who had knowledge of the Scripture. He was not a jinni as the jinni said that he was able to bring it within two hours.

I will not say the name of the person who brought the throne. I will not talk about the Scripture he referred to. The one who realizes Allah's Power in what happened and continues arguing and asks curious questions, does not deserve to be answered. Furthermore, my duty, as the chief of the intelligence agency, is to keep secrets.

Of course, I know who brought the throne. I know how he brought it.

In vain you wait for me to reveal the secret. I will never reveal it. Who knows! These papers may run into enemy hands. If Sulayman wants to tell the secret, it is up to him. But I will keep my beak shut.

Sulayman ordered his servants to disguise the throne and change it beyond recognition. He ordered precious stones, gems and pearls to be put in places around the disk of the sun. Moreover, he ordered his servants to build a palace. Half of this palace was extended over the water of the sea. Also he ordered them to make its floor of transparent crystal so the visitor could watch the seabed with its colored fish and aquatic animals. He ordered them to make the walls with perfumed sandalwood and the roof with colored glass so that when the sunrays fall upon the roof, its colors come in their seven original ones and color the entire palace. In this way, the sun is used as a servant to man as Almighty Allah created it to be.

Sulayman ordered them to build it before the arrival of Balqis, the queen of Sheba.

They finished it.

At first, I did not understand the reason behind what Sulayman was doing. Sometimes I do not understand him.

Sulayman ordered to disguise the queen's throne and to put it at the reception. Also he ordered all the walls before the throne to be opened.

At that time, I began to understand Sulayman. He did not want to argue with her much. - When she viewed his dominion, glory and magnificence and compared them to hers, he wanted her to realize that worshiping the sun or any other creature could not lead to success or progress even if some mistakenly thought so.

Success and progress could be achieved only by submitting to Almighty Allah and then by gaining knowledge.

I realized that and as the days passed my opinion was proven correct. She submitted, together with Sulayman, to Almighty Allah. *"He said, 'Disguise her throne for her that we may see whether she will be guided (to recognize her throne), or she will be one of those not guided.' So when she came, it was said (to her), 'Is your throne like this?' She said, '(It is) as though it were the very same.' And [Sulayman (Solomon) said], 'Knowledge was bestowed on us before her, and we were submitted to Allah (in Islam as Muslims before her).' And that which she used to worship besides Allah has prevented her (from Islam), for she was of a disbelieving people. It was said to her, 'Enter As-Sarh' [(a glass surface with water underneath it) or a palace], but when she saw it, she thought it was a*

pool, and she (tucked up her clothes) uncovering her legs, Sulayman (Solomon) said, 'Verily, it is Sarh [(a glass surface with water underneath it) or a palace] paved smooth with slab of glass.' She said, 'My Lord! Verily, I have wronged myself, and I submit (in Islam, together with Sulayman (Solomon), to Allah, the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists).'"

No sooner had she said these words than I stood in front of Sulayman and flapped my wings.

"My wise master," I cried, "I have won the case for you and saved the queen and her people from perdition."

"Marhala, what do you want? I am satisfied with your work." Sulayman replied.

"Where is my reward?" I asked.

He said, "Choose one of the two: either to increase your salary or to grant you the Hoopoes' Legion of Honor of the first class."

I said, "These two rewards together are not enough for me ... I want to live in history."

,"I will attribute you to me," he stated, "I will call you Sulayman's hoopoe."

"Am I not your hoopoe!" I said.

"Really, you are Sulayman's hoopoe ... But I will announce it all over the world."

"The whole world does not suffice me," I said, "I want more."

Sulayman looked amazed and said, "What do you want Marhala?"

I said, "I want to go down in history! I want millions of people to be acquainted with this case. I want all creatures to remember me even after my death. I want them to know me from now to the Day of Judgment."

Sulayman amiably said, "Marhala, I have nothing to do ... Only Allah, the One, has the decision over all affairs."

I said, "O great Prophet, I know that for sure, but you can invoke Allah to make my name live in history.

Sulayman raised his head and suddenly asked me, "Marhala! Are you affected by pride? Do you overestimate yourself?"

I said boldly, "O Prophet! Pride is not my target. I want people to know that a humble and simple hoopoe was the means of guiding an entire nation to Allah through His Infinite Mercy. This is my legitimate right. My right and glory at the same time."

Sulayman smiled and patted me on the head and invoked Allah to make my remembrance live in history till the Day of Judgment.

Sulayman finished his supplication ...

I bowed and kissed his hand that was patting my head.

He signaled me to leave. While I was preparing myself to leave, I said, "O great Prophet! I know that Almighty Allah will answer your supplication but I do not know how Allah will make me live in history till the Day of Judgment. Which Book will remain until that Day?"

Sulayman said, "I am like you. I do not know Ghayb (The unseen matters). You asked me to invoke Allah for you, so I did.

Believe me I do not know how Allah will answer me. Really, I do not know the Book that will remain until the Day of Judgment! Furthermore, I do not know to whom this Book will be revealed.

I do not know ...

I do not know the *Ghayb* ... "

The Ants of Prophet Sulayman

﴾Till, when they came to the valley of the ants, one of the ants said, 'O ants! Enter your dwellings, lest Sulayman (Solomon) and his hosts crush you, while they perceive not.'﴿

(An-Naml: 18)

I am an ant, so of course I know why Allah created us ants. But you know, I fail to understand why Allah created man.

I find it quite strange, even amazing, and sometimes irritating, to see a creature that walks carelessly and treads upon armies of ants. More than that, with his horse he destroys thousands of ants without sensing or feeling anything! He does such things without knowing ... without realizing ... without noticing ... without understanding and without feeling angry or sad.

Do you notice the harshness that is hidden somewhere in his carelessness?

We ants can carry a grain of rice for half a day. Our life is not easy. Sometimes we find a piece of sugar and the High Council of Specialists for Food Security holds a counsel, "There is a piece of sugar over there," they might say.

"Where?" we would ask.

"At a distance of one thousand ant steps from the apple tree."

"How many ants are required in order to bring it?" we ask.

"Ten thousand ants."

"Gather an army of fifty thousand ants," we say as we organize ourselves.

We have good reasons for increasing the number of our armies.

The main reason is that man is so excessive in destroying us without reason or excuse. I am an ant and an ant is a very small thing; a small insect but at the same time, a complete being and our existence coincides with our nature and wisdom stands as an integral part of our character. The motto of our life is to be clear and straight to the point.

Although we are no larger more than two millimeters, Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful has compensated us for our minute size and weak body with the talent of organization, management and making meticulous calculations. We are very clever you know!

We are never taken by surprise. We believe in Allah's fate and the destiny decreed by Him. We know that a cup of water can drown an army of ants, but our belief in Allah does not prevent us from making calculations, feasibility studies, researching and organizing and managing everything striving for wisdom and perfection. Furthermore, we understand that belief in Allah obligates us to do so, for the laws of the universe are not to be broken for anybody and no creature is to stray from its nature.

I do not want to waste your time, for time is indeed precious. I was an ant and one of the guards at the valley of ants. Do you know where the valley of ants is?

If you do not know then I think that is for the best. It is better for little creatures to hide their valleys in order to preserve their lives, especially from the big feet of man.

It is common knowledge that a creature's small size may be the cause of his destruction. Amidst this worldly jungle in which we live, you have to be either a wolf or be eaten by wolves; and you have to be either a tiger or be eaten by tigers. That is what man says, isn't it? So what can ants do as they are one of the smallest creatures in this world?

The mercy of Almighty Allah has answered this question. We do not need to be wolves anymore in order to not be eaten by the strong among the wolves. Allah has provided us with an outstanding life and there are no other creatures that can do meticulous work to the degree of finesse like ants!

Ants do not live alone. We live in colonies that consist of hundreds of thousands and the division of labor is clear and well known. For example, males cannot perform the work of females and the job of the worker-ants cannot be performed by anyone except them.

Our cities are located underground. They are cities that are connected by a complicated system of roads that make it impossible for anyone but ants to pass through. Moreover, we build our cities deep under the ground in order to ward off any possible danger.

There are three kinds of ants: females, males and worker-ants. Every kind is born with an inherent knowledge of the work it is supposed to do. Unlike humans, we do not have teachers, for we learn directly from Almighty Allah. The first ant that was created by Allah knew all the sciences and passed her knowledge onto the successive generations.

As soon as an ant is born and knows her position in the world of the ants, she instantly starts performing her responsibilities.

We do never complain, we never aspire, we never covet and we never dream.

We do not grow wings except when we are in love. Only in the mating season, do our wings grow. What people regard as a special kind of species of flying ants is in fact nothing but a troop of males and females in the season of love.

At the end of this season, the male falls to the ground and dies. His task is over and his life has no more meaning. Once the male dies, the female's task begins. She bites off her wings, for she does not need them any more. Then, she builds her nest in the ground and lays her eggs. This little nest will become a colony of ants.

It is a colony that may become colonies and then turn into a valley of ants. This valley is laid out over and under the ground. It includes houses for each individual in it and also contains a certain percentage of each kind living in it.

One of the mysteries that scientists have not yet discovered about us, and I do not think that they will ever discover, lurks in these questions, "Why do ants have males, females and

worker-ants each of a limited number? Why does the mother ant lay her eggs that hatch to be worker-ants? Why do these worker-ants grow in order to make it possible for the mother ant to lay millions of eggs throughout the rest of her life?" "Also, why does the mother lay the males after that and then the females? Why does she choose a certain number of males and a certain number of females so that are the number will be sufficient for life to continue and be organized in such an astonishing way? Does the mother ant make all these calculations that no human or electronic mind could ever achieve? Does an ant really do that?"

Human beings cannot determine the sex of an embryo, but ants can do that easily and do so without understanding how they are able to. Scientists will remain confounded in this secret of the ant world and this secret will ever remain a mystery for them as well as for me. I, also, do not know the answer to this secret.

It is enough to say that Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful knew before He created us what we would encounter at the hands of human beings; and Allah, the Almighty, knew that if a child were to tread upon a colony of ants he could unintentionally kill a thousand ants with his foot. For this reason Allah provided us with what He did not provide man. He has guided us to what He did not guide man to and bestowed upon us weapons that help us survive in a world where the conflict of survival never ceases for a moment.

Now, I will talk to you a little about myself. I was born a worker-ant, a hard laborer ... We are born in the form of eggs, then we become a larvae and then pupae. After that we come to know what kind we belong to.

When the egg, I was in, hatched, the mother washed the larva with her tongue, gave me the food that she had stored in her stomach and kept me from harm until I grew up. When I grew up I realized that I was a guard.

Worker-ants have different duties. Among them there are servants to clean the colonies, soldiers to protect them and patrol ants to keep the colony save from harm.

I am from the watch patrol. In fact, I am a chief. In the beginning I watched our colonies that were flourishing with interesting slowness but it was usual to progress in a steadfast manner.

I watched the worker-ants that were nursing the children. I watched the worker-ants that were milking the ant cows. Yes, we milk a certain type of insect that is responsible for making honey nectar just as human beings milk cows. I watched the builders among the worker-ants as they were digging tunnels and houses under the ground. I was responsible for the external dangers of which man was the most dangerous.

Yes, man is one of the most dangerous forces.

Apart from man, there are hundreds of natural forces that also threaten ants. The first of these dangers is rain, for we are creatures that do not know how to swim. We drown in water.

The moment lightening and thunder strike, we let out a yell of warning and declare a state of emergency and all ants flee to their houses underground. Moreover, we, the watch patrol, survey the situation from places far from the rain but which are nearer to it than the places of the other ants.

When the rain stops we do not hurry to the surface for but we remain in our homes surveying the situation. We wait for the sun to reappear.

The sun is strange because we never see it first, but we feel its presence. It eats one of the greatest dangers that threatens us. The sun soaks up the water.

As soon as the sun appears in a place that has water, something interesting, which we cannot comprehend, occurs. The sun soaks up the water. Where does it go? Does it evaporate? What does it mean?

We are always surprised to find that when the sun appears, the pools of water, that were made by the rain, have disappeared. This is a mystery that deeply confounds me when I contemplate things in my free time. I do not understand. I do not know how all this happens. In this way I continue praising Allah while I declare that I neither understand nor comprehend His Wisdom.

All I know is that Allah is Merciful towards ants and one of the signs of His Mercy is what the sun does to the water. But how does the sun do what it does? This too is a secret. I confess my inability of revealing its mystery.

After the danger of water, comes the danger of man. He destroys, kills and demolishes us without any sense. He does not feel for us. Why does man have no sense? Why does he not feel?

Ants hold thousands of meetings in order to discuss this question. The final statement was as follows, "The human squashes us with his feet because he does not look at the ground when he walks. He looks in front and behind and around but rarely bows his head. What pride that creature called man harbors!

If he watched his step, the catastrophes that have taken place throughout the long history of ants would never have occurred."

I confess that I met by chance, during my long life, a human or two who were watching their steps. They were two ascetic worshipers and their humility took the form of mercy whose effects extended to ants. I do not know the name of the second man but the name of the first one was king Sulayman, the wise Prophet.

I knew the wise Sulayman because knowing him was part of my duty in the watch patrol. For watching over the valleys of ants does not occur only within the valleys themselves. There is a watch patrol station in the colonies themselves and there is a mobile watch patrol that goes far from the colony and surveys any movements that may affect the valley of ants.

My surveillance was of this kind.

One day I was crawling about and walked a long way. It was a distance that humans could accomplish in moments. I did not feel despair nor did I feel hate towards man.

One of the good traits of ants is that they are small in size but big in mind. Yes, I confess that I am a wise ant. For sure, wisdom is better than wealth that is accompanied with pride, and better than poverty that is followed by hate.

I started crawling ... step by step ... We praise Allah while we are walking and sometimes we stop and change our direction and walk a step and then go back to our original course. What man may regard as weird in an ant's actions has wisdom ... for we praise Allah in all four directions. Wherever you turn yourselves or your faces, there is the Face of Allah.

I know that for sure. This is the knowledge from which the tree of wisdom stems. After walking a long way, I coincidentally came upon a tree. I climbed it, stood, looked, praised Allah, turned and looked again.

My stare froze! Suddenly fear overwhelmed me. I smelt unrevealed danger. There was a tremendous army gathering. It was not a normal army and it was not like the armies of the present time. Normally, an army consists of human soldiers just like an army of ants consists of ant soldiers. Much to my surprise, what I beheld before me was not an army of humans ... it was an army of Jinn, humans and birds.

"And there were gathered before Sulayman his hosts of jinn and men, and birds, and they all were set in battle order (marching forwards)."

Endless rows of humans, endless rows of animals and endless rows of birds!

The wind was gathering as if it was subjugated to the army. Then, came the rows of Jinn ... The Jinn are invisible creatures that we ants sense but do not see and do not worry ourselves about. Once I saw Sulayman's army, I was filled with fear.

If this army were to walk through the valley, it would mean utter destruction for the entire ant valley. The painful part is that this would happen unconsciously on the part of the army.

I came down from the tree and walked with the speed of danger. This is the maximum speed for ants. We have five speeds and this is the fastest. I geared my five speeds to their maximum limit and got down from the tree. At the same time I

ejected a smell that has significant in the world of ants. It means a warning to the ants to gather at the outskirts of the colony. All the ants that were working outside the colony made their way quickly to it. I reached the valley of ants.

There was an emergency meeting of those in charge of guarding the colony. The smell I had released had gathered them. I stood to give my report to the highest official of the ant colony. This official was a silent ant but had the ability to make fast and decisive decisions in less than a blink of an eye.

I said, "There is an army near our valley."

The official ant asked, "How many humans are there?"

"The army does not consist of humans only," I replied.

The official ant said (while rubbing her head), "The army is not of humans!"

"It is an army of Jinn, humans and birds," I added.

A meeting of the highest officials of the ant colony was held and it continued for a few seconds. The security procedures were given out to all ants, inside or outside the colony. The orders that were given to the ants inside the colony were that they should remain in their houses. While making preparations for this, the worker-ants started airing houses lest they would stay there for a long time.

The orders given to the ants outside the colony was that they should make hast and return to the outskirts of the colony.

A double system of protective vigilance was established outside. All systems of warning were prepared and I was appointed as the head to announce the last warning shout.

On normal days, I was stationed on a little hill but during these exceptional circumstances my position changed and so I climbed a tree branch and stood watching attentively.

I was watching a certain road on the horizon ... a road that Sulayman's army would have to take in order to pass through the area. I did not have to wait a long time, before the army appeared. They were such a small speck, faraway, like an ant! Then it started getting bigger and so I shouted, *"O ants! Enter your dwellings, lest Sulayman and his hosts crush you, while they perceive not."*

As soon as I shouted my warning, the ants rushed into their houses. I was not surprised at that, but at the same time something else happened ... Sulayman and his army stopped. I was totally surprised.

Prophet Sulayman looked at the tree I was standing on and smiled. I was extremely surprised at what was happening.

"Could this human truly understand what I have said?" I thought. His smile carried the taste of honey and seemed inlaid with mercy that we do not feel except among ourselves.

I felt that Sulayman understood what I had said and so had stopped.

I was surprised when he bowed his head and said, *"My Lord! Inspire and bestow upon me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your Favors which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds that will please You, and admit me by Your Mercy among Your righteous slaves."*

I then realized that he was talking to Almighty Allah and was praying.

My astonishment increased.

It increased even further when he turned to me and addressed me in my native tongue saying, "Have no fear ... the army will not destroy the valley of ants. We will change our course and steer faraway from your valley."

I could hardly believe my ears and said, "Who are you sir? You can talk the language of ants!"

He said, "I am the servant of Allah and His Prophet Sulayman. My father is Prophet Dawud (David). Allah taught us the languages of birds and animals."

I said to him, "So you are a Prophet and son of a Prophet, aren't you?"

"Yes," he replied.

I said, "And you addressed Allah saying, *"Admit me by Your Mercy among Your righteous slaves,"* didn't you?"

"Yes," he replied.

I said, "Is the rank of submission higher than the rank of prophethood?"

Sulayman said, "No, O ant there are not two ranks ... The peak of prophethood is submission and that constitutes the most honorable rank a human being can obtain."

I said to him, "O righteous servant ... I will pray to Allah that He admits you by His Mercy among His righteous slaves ... So why do you not pray for me?"

Sulayman said smiling, "I do not know what can I ask Allah for you! But I feel that Allah, the Almighty, will use the words

you have used to warn the ants, to be verses that will be recited by the believers during prayers."

He then turned to his army and ordered, "Steer away from the valley of ants and march forward."

The Termite

﴿Then when We decreed death for him [Sulayman (Solomon)], nothing informed them (Jinn) of his death except a termite, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his stick, so when he fell down, the Jinn saw clearly that if they had known the Ghayb (unseen), they would not have stayed in the humiliating torment.﴾

(Saba': 14)

Let me tell you what happened.

While we were just tiny ants that live in our houses, we used to hear many different stories about the relationships between Jinn and people. In spite of our tiny size we realized that these relationships were really a weapon for the Jinn. Allah had subjected the Jinn to Sulayman in order to serve him. They (the Jinn) could dive deep into the seas ... They could build whatever Sulayman wanted like castles and houses within days ... They could pave roads in just hours. This subjection happened only in the time of Sulayman to go against an old law that had separated the Jinn from the humans.

This subjection of the Jinn was one of Sulayman's miracles that Allah granted him. And people witnessed many supernatural things that the Jinn could do while human beings

could not. Therefore, people's belief in Allah was supposed to increase. Moreover, their realization of Allah's Infinite Power was supposed also to increase. But what happened was that myths and illusions started to spread ... People started to believe in the ability of Jinn without attributing the miracle to Allah. Ignorant people went so far as to say that the Jinn know the Ghayb.

Being an ant - who keeps herself to herself - I do not know who spread this ridiculous rumor. For none knows the Ghayb save Allah: not the Jinn, not the humans, not the Prophets, not the friends of Allah and not the angels.

"Allah is the Creator and everything else starting from the angels and ending with ants are creatures ... Some of them are sublime like the angels; some are great like the humans and some are simple like ants. For sure, the Ghayb is Allah's Will that is carried out against everything. And, no one knows Allah's Will except Him. No human beings or ants whether they are sovereign upon people or sovereign upon ants, know the Ghayb. Pray tell me, "Who can tell us what is going to happen tomorrow?"

I apologize for this introduction; I apologize for I know it is obvious, but I am compelled to tell my tale. As I said, a rumor saying that the Jinn know the Ghayb has spread. I do not know if it was spread by an individual of the Jinn or by a human. What is important is that it has almost become an axiom. And, being an ant, I know that the Jinn do not know the Ghayb. In spite of being a weak, simple and humble ant that even the slightest blow from a human's mouth can blow me away, I was predestined to be the sole evidence of proof in the case that the Jinn do not know the Ghayb.

I was able to prove this fact! Surprisingly, I did that without really intending to. I was hungry and I did not know what to do, so I ate the staff ... I mean Sulayman's staff.

You see, I am a wood-eating ant. Some people call me a termite.

I want to flash back a little so we can understand how it all began. My acquaintance with Sulayman started from the news we used to hear about him. Sulayman was the most famous person of his time. He was rich to the extent that the walls and ceilings of his temple were made out of expensive wood that was plated with gold. Us termites used to dream of being invited to this banquet. Except that the gold was a nuisance that stood in our way of getting to that delicious wood. So, we had no real hope of ever getting this meal. What a dream!

This fact was one of the things we knew about Sulayman and that was closely connected to our life. Sulayman was a dream to us. An impossible dream.

As I started to say: I am a wood-eating ant. People call our kind white ants in order to distinguish us from the ordinary ants. But in fact we are not white ants. We only consent to it because many people know us as such.

We are of a slightly higher rank than normal ants. I am called an earth ant. We are pale-colored and our way of life is somewhat strange. Sometimes we dig in the earth and build houses that can hold six hundred thousand ants. Even though we live underground we have an airing system and we sometimes build parallel tunnels under the ground. Each tunnel is located directly under the other.

Moreover, we fix the pebbles of sand and dust with our saliva so that these barriers become like human cement as they are so solid. The king of the white ants lives long, and the queen is responsible for laying eggs. During her life span, the queen lays around ten million eggs and then these eggs hatch to become soldiers and workers, both males and females. The white ant soldiers are bigger in size than the workers and their heads are large and solid.

When we white ants attack another ant city, the soldiers are in the lead of the army but in front of them stand the commandos. The commando ants have long noses that resemble a beak and when ordinary ants attack these beaked-ants they secrete a sticky liquid that sticks to the neck of the enemy soldier ant like glue. In this way we paralyze our enemies and win. We feed mainly on wood. Our stomach contains certain kinds of bacteria that help us digest wood and make it tasty, just like the most delicious food of the humans.

White ants have special migrations where we go out in large numbers once in a lifetime. We fly in big swarms of males and females in search of new homes. Most of us fall prey to birds and animals or we die because of other reasons. Then a male and female survive from this group and instantly start digging a new home after they get rid of their wings that they now have no use for. After that, they get married in their underground house and start establishing a new colony. In this way it takes only two of us to produce a whole new generation.

I was flying with a thousand of my kind when I suddenly fell. One of my wings had come off while I was flying. Where do you think I landed? In the mihrab of Sulayman where he used

to worship Allah. As soon as I had fallen I got rid of my other wing and started exploring the place. I felt a little bit dizzy after my fall but, honestly speaking, I felt even dizzier when I started walking about the mihrab. The greatness of the mihrab surpassed the ability of an ant's mind to even comprehend. The floors were made of marble covered with carpets; the walls were made of pure crystal, there was no ceiling and Sulayman's chair was made of gold. Sulayman was sitting on his chair and was supporting his chin with a staff he was holding in his hand. No one dared to barge in on the mihrab while Sulayman was in a state of worship.

Anything in the world should wait for Sulayman until he finished performing his prayer. Around the mihrab, the Jinn were hurrying about their work while they watched Sulayman who was sitting down.

I realized that I had made a fatal mistake for I was the only creature that had dared to enter Sulayman's mihrab. What would happen if he were to raise his head and see me? I told myself that I should greet him so he would not be surprised by my presence.

I whispered, "Greetings upon the Prophet king Sulayman the wise. Sir, I am an ant that has fallen here by mistake. I seek your forgiveness. If you would show me the door, I will leave."

Sulayman did not answer.

I raised my voice higher but Sulayman remained silent. I came closer to him and raised my head to look at his reverent, beautiful and graceful face. His eyes were open and staring at the space of ground before me. He was not blinking.

I said to myself that he might be absorbed in his prayer and so I stood still. A long time passed and he did not move. I came closer to him and said in a weak voice, "Sir King Sulayman! I am hungry. It is my mealtime and there is not even one piece of wood in the whole room except for the staff you are leaning on. What should I do?"

Sulayman did not answer, so I came closer to him and repeated a new petition. I explained that I was hungry and that the staff he was leaning on was my only food.

Despite all this, Sulayman remained silent. The night passed and morning came and Sulayman still did not move. The realization suddenly hit me that he was dead. The whiteness of his lips; the grayness of his face and his still silence, were things that told me he was dead. I prayed long for his pure soul and then advanced towards the staff. It was sustenance provided by Allah.

I started eating the staff. Ah! It was made out of the wood of carob. "This staff reminds me of the destruction that will befall Sulayman's house," I thought while eating.

"O generous Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon you) ... you are kind whether dead or alive ... for even though you are dead you feed me your staff. How noble you are!" I said to myself.

I started eating again. It took me days to eat a part of it. Then the body suddenly became unbalanced and Sulayman fell to the ground. I did not mean to do that. As soon as Sulayman fell to the ground, I felt my whole body shaking.

The Jinn were passing by the mihrab and when they saw Sulayman's body sprawled on the ground, they began to spread the news. Sulayman's ministers entered the mihrab and found him dead.

The jinn stopped working after learning of Sulayman's death because they realized that they were now free from their subjection to Sulayman.

It took a while for the people to discover that Sulayman had died a long time ago and all this while the jinn were working oblivious to everything. His death was from the Ghayb and so the jinn did not know about it.

The proof was made clear.

"So when he fell down, the Jinn saw clearly that if they had known the Ghayb, they would not have stayed in the humiliating torment."

I, the small ant, uncovered what I uncovered and dispelled the lie of the Jinn knowing the Ghayb. I was the means to exposing the truth when I let the staff fall. Even though my mouth can hardly be seen, I let the curtain fall on the wide reign of Sulayman. It was a reign in which both the biggest and smallest creatures took part. Surprisingly, the smallest and most simple creature was the one that let the curtains fall on it. Praise be to He Who gives and takes, and gives reign and takes it again. Praise be to He Who made a beginning and an ending for every thing. Praise be to Allah for the beginning and the end.

`Uzayr's Donkey

﴾Or like the one who passed by a town and it had tumbled over its roofs. He said, 'Oh! How will Allah ever bring it to life after its death?' So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up (again). He said, 'How long did you remain (dead)?' He (the man) said, '(Perhaps) I remained (dead) a day or part of a day'. He said, 'Nay, you have remained (dead) for a hundred years, look at your food and your drink, they show no change; and look at your donkey! And thus We have made of you a sign for the people. Look at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh.' When this was clearly shown to him, he said, 'I know (now) that Allah is Able to do all things.'﴿

(Al-Baqarah: 259)

There is a common belief among human beings that donkeys cannot read nor write. But, this is not true, for some donkeys find this very easy.

We can read the trail of a scent on the ground. From the blasts of the wind, we know about expected weather changes. However, it is true that we do not write except during some rare occasions, like when there is a confession, complaint or something dangerous that we want to say.

I know that people have formed a bad opinion of donkeys but I would like to say that donkeys have also formed a bad opinion of some people.

That is enough of that as I do not want to become distracted from the important things I want to say. It just so happens that we become distracted while we walk or talk. We look all around us when we walk instead of looking in front of us. That is why people put dark blinkers on to the sides of our eyes so that we can see clearly in front of us. If that was possible in the realm of writing, the donkey would have become something great in the world of literature.

Oh, I have forgotten the main point that I wanted to make. I remembered now, I was talking about donkeys.

Donkeys are a patient species and I am proud to belong to them. In fact, I descended from a great zebra that lived a long time ago in the jungles of Somalia. Then, feuds started between this great, wild grandfather and the lion. The cursed lion had no taste for flesh except that of our deceased grandfather. At the same time, this grandfather only thought about one thing and that was breeding. Nevertheless, it was in vain, as the number of his species continued to decrease.

Finally, our grandfather found a way to save himself from the lion. He let humans domesticate the weakest of his offspring on condition that the human would carry the responsibility of protecting this offspring from the lion and in return the donkey would serve the human being by carrying him and his heavy belongings. It was a black day where our issue was divided: the wild stock issue that remained as it is, and a new domestic stock which is represented by us donkeys of today.

Our kind is clearly different from our wild relatives. For humility changes the creature's outside appearance as well as his internal reality. Our ears have become longer, our heads bigger, our teeth have lost their sharpness, our backs stronger and our stomachs bigger. In order to fill these huge stomachs, we have to endure painful lashes over our heads and backs.

This dangerous transformation that occurred in the life of a donkey happened about twelve thousand years ago, and it seems to me that Allah wanted to honor the human and serve him so He entrusted our patient kind with this difficult mission of serving man.

Nobody in this universe has made use of the donkey like the human being. Despite all that there is no thanks, no praise and no confession of gratitude. The human's main problem, from our objective point of view, is that he measures everything in this world according to his own interests. He considers himself the center of this universe and the most important thing in it. Moreover, he exercises this sovereignty spontaneously from the time he was born. This is not what we agreed to.

For, in the covenant by which we are subjected to the human beings there is a definition of man as the master of this universe and Allah's vicegerent on the earth. This item was obvious and clear in its emphasis in that the human is an elevated creature that acknowledges Allah and worships Him: who constructs the earth and changes it and who treats kindly all the creatures that Allah has subjected to him in order to serve and help him.

Nevertheless, this particular item has been ignored and donkeys have come to discover that human beings behave even worse than lions. For, lions simply eat us without being sly

about it. As for the human, he slyly devours our rights and works us to death in a very sly way. He believes he is doing us a favor whereas in truth he is indebted to us. He imagines himself more refined because he belongs to the race of the human being but really, we donkeys see that he is only human by name. In spite of all that we are still patient.

I do not want to jump from the land of contentment to the land of bitterness. I am a donkey in contentment and if I were to know bitterness or anger, I would have been a lion, an eagle or a monster. We do not like change. Every donkey dislikes change intensely. It is an instinctive trait in us.

I have not introduced myself to the reader. I am a reddish-white donkey. I live in a rural city in Palestine. My master is a good, white-haired man called `Uzayr. Most people misread his name as being `Aziz, and then they say that donkeys are slow and stupid! Ha ha ha!

I will not pause to debate about that! I simply continue wagging my tail.

Why do I want to write about my memories even though I know that donkeys are distinguished by the virtues of humility and self-denial?

This is an important question and it will be answered Insha' Allah. I want to assure the reader, whether he is a donkey or a human, that I am not writing this to show off or to seek glory and pride. I do not want to prove that I am more important than all the other donkeys. It is just that I had a strange experience; an interesting and astonishing one.

The experience I had was such that if anyone were to experience and tell me about it, I would probably not believe him. The problem is that this experience happened to me personally and I am going to narrate it exactly as it happened.

Can you imagine that I died! That my musical bray stopped! That my bones turned into dust! And then, by the Mercy of Allah, I came back to life again and I began to bray.

My head becomes dizzy whenever I remember what happened.

How about starting the story from its very beginning? Good idea, right? I do not like the new technique of narrating stories starting from the end and then using flashbacks.

I was born one day and there is nothing new about that for all donkeys are born. But, what was unusual was that when I asked about my father, my mother looked confusedly at the dozens of donkeys that were in their stalls and said in despair, "Your father was the great beast that fought the lion."

My mother went on telling me a long story about the glories of my father who lived in the jungles of fear. By the end of the story I found that she still had not answered my question.

I found when I grew up that I was faced with the first fact in the world of donkeys; there is a mother but no father.

The mother does not know who the father is from all the commotion of life and the large extent of excessiveness in business and polygyny. Also, the young donkey does not know who his father is because the male donkey does not bring-up his children or care for them. This fact pained me in during my childhood. However, what I regarded as harsh soon disclosed great new wisdom.

A donkey is a silent and patient animal enduring great hardship that might shorten his life on earth and it is important for our stock to increase in number in our world. For this reason the donkey is always preoccupied with a desire for the other sex.

Actually, there is not even one donkey thinks that there is a female devoid of beauty or charm and our kind does not believe in forbidding any kind of affection.

For sure, giving reign to sensual desires without restrain is considered one of the donkeys' traits, but we sometimes find this trait in people too ... Whenever I see someone who is immodest like us, I say to myself, "There goes a true donkey hiding behind the mask of human skin."

I feel compassion and closeness towards this colleague. For he enjoys his freedom in making love just like us. He, like us, thinks only of two things: food and women.

Sometimes I talk to myself, "What do you think? Maybe this creature was a donkey at some time. He maybe a more developed image of a donkey ... Who knows?"

I love talking and I would like to talk about my childhood just like human writers, but I regret not remembering my childhood. All I remember is the fairytale about our great grandfather that lived in the jungle. Anything other than that is dark and foggy in my mind. As donkeys, we do not think about the past and do not worry ourselves with what has not happened yet. Our minds are completely absorbed with the present moment; we do not think about what was before it and do not comprehend what is after it. All I know about our childhood is that we were named differently. We were happy little donkeys

that had not yet turned away from the mask of illusion. The little donkey lives under the delusion that the world is his mother that feeds him and after whom he walks happily while wagging his tail.

Then, the little donkey grows up, stops nursing and starts his own life. Then he is in for a big shock. He no longer remembers his mother. He would not recognize her even if he saw her. She is just the same as anybody else.

My master `Uzayr has arrived. I can smell him coming home. I raise my head and bray to welcome him. He is a kind man who has never hit me either with his staff or his hand. He feeds me the best of what he has and eats the rest himself. He treats me with mercy and comforts me while being hard on himself. I have been living with him now for two years. And after having lived with him for a year and a half I discovered that the man was a Prophet of Allah. I apologize for having failed to discover this fact earlier but in the end I am after all a donkey and I do not want to claim virtues that I do not have. Before being employed by this generous and kind Prophet, I worked for a rich tradesman, or to be more precise I worked for a stingy thief.

I swear by the beans that have been dried by the sun and by the fields of green hay that my former master was a stingy thief. When he bought me, he went on patting my head and my back so I thought that he was kind and so I loved him. But we had hardly reached his house when I started to feel worried.

The man used me to make a daily fortune that would have been enough to buy a field of beans. Nevertheless, he lived on an egg for a whole week. For he would eat one-sevenths of an

egg each day along with a piece of stale bread, and would then hit his wife because she had eaten a whole egg. He lived in a very simple house made out of tree-branches. The walls were hardly winter-durable. And, when the food was put in front of me I brayed a long bray that meant, "My stomach is big and this food is very little." He gave me a harsh look and hit me hard. Therefore I understood that he realized the meaning of my braying. After that, I was careful not to bray in front of him.

And so the black days of my life in his employment began.

I discovered that he had bought me in order to build a stone-house. Some men would break-off stones from a mountain and I would carry them on my back to the building site. Days passed by and my back became raw from my heavy load. He only served me the worst food. Moreover, if I were to look at a white female donkey and invite her for love, he would hit me and prevent me from practicing my favorite hobby.

He would say that he wanted me to save my strength to finish his work, What selfishness! I hated him just as I hate the wolf and perhaps even more.

I patiently continued with the work and also with the hunger. I endured torture, beating and starvation and became a prisoner to my peaceful nature. So when my freedom in practicing sex was threatened, I found myself thinking deeply. For surely this is the only situation that could make donkeys think deeply.

Examining the lives of people and donkeys closely, I can say that reward is not distributed according to each one's effort, rather it is distributed according to each one's ability to bluff. I found that the most debased of persons sit on thrones of pride,

wealth and respect. Also, I saw that sinners rarely pay the price for their sins, but continue their journey on earth, in safety and at ease. As well as being robbed by thieves, I saw thieves stealing the food of orphans and as a result orphans and innocents were the ones thrown in prison. To my surprise, I found that the more man steals, the more value he has and the less he usurps the less he is appreciated. I saw the human is unjust to his fellow man and permits for himself what he prohibits for others. I saw a white she-donkey and I brayed to her but then I felt the strikes upon my back, and we were separated from each other.

It was unbearable. I had enough ... That was the last straw!

This situation scarred my heart like rivers scar the solid earth to pave the way for their course. It completely broke my heart. I expressed myself in a painful bray, "The food is scarce, my stomach is big, it is terribly hot, my back is raw and I am alone and this is for your information."

Donkeys always say, "This is for your information," at the end of their braying as an old routine that all donkeys follow. There is nobody like the donkey for keeping to routine.

My bray was over and so I decided to change my life style. Should I become a horse and waste my life carrying a tyrannical Sultan or an unjust king?

It is a kind of ruin to wear the cloth of elegance. Anyway, it is impossible for me to become a horse because donkeys shy away from change. I have no other choice but to be stubborn.

So I decided to resist!

My tyrannical master made me carry his load and when he poked me with his stick to walk, I refused. Therefore, he struck

me on my back and face but that only increased my patience and firmness. I absolutely refused to move.

He took me to an old man who claims knowledge in the field of donkey medicine and he asked him, "Is the donkey sick?"

The man touched my stomach with his stick, opened my mouth and looked at my teeth. Then he said, "This donkey is as fit as a fiddle but he is lazy."

I drew my features in a lazy expression.

The blows became even more violent and I became more insistent on not moving, even one step. I stopped dead in my tracks. I brayed saying, "It is just a beating, and I shall not die."

Then, one day the blows hurt me badly and they were coming from behind me so I raised my hind feet and kicked the aggressor. It was one kick that could be classified as legal self-defence.

My kick hurt the tyrant's hand and so he yelled out in pain, flamed up with rage and said, "The donkey is being stubborn! He hit me. I will kill him. Bring me a knife and an ax."

I did not even blink an eye.

I knew he was stingy and so would not carry out his threat. He might however think of selling me.

The stubbornness policy was fruitful and so the man decided to sell me at the first market to be held.

He pulled me to the market and yelled out, "Look here! Look here! Here is an energetic donkey whose capacity to work never ceases."

One of the tradesmen asked him, "How much do you want for him?"

He said, "Ten silver pieces."

The tradesman rode me for a while so I acted like a slowpoke. The tradesman opened my mouth and said, "His teeth are fit and youthful ... so what is the secret behind his laziness ... two silver pieces."

My master screamed as if someone had stabbed him with a knife and beat me while assuring that, "I equaled my weight in gold." Once again he tried to persuade me to run. I refused. I acted lazy and moved slowly. I knew that I was putting myself at risk of not being sold and remaining with my aggressive master, but I persisted in what I was doing because I wanted to be sold for the cheapest price to irritate my stingy master. That is exactly what happened. He lost hope in me and sold me for two silver pieces and left. As soon as my new master climbed on my back, I flew with him down the road. My old master stood looking at me and his eyes were filled with tears of rage.

Once we had ridden out of his sight, I slowed down. What do we get in return for energy, work and speed? Nothing! So I became lazy.

We reached the tradesman's house and I found that he owned a large number of donkeys. I saw more than one white she-donkey, so I raised my head and brayed, "I am happy! I am happy! Is there a white she-donkey next to me? I feel lonely. This is for your information."

A wonderful night passed by and the next morning I made a discovery that heightened my already bad opinion of human beings.

I heard the tradesman telling his assistant, "I want you to sort out all the lazy donkeys and put them aside."

I was from the lazy lot. The tradesman lighted a piece of wood and passed it fast over the donkeys' hind legs. He tied up the donkeys and tortured them by burning. I did not understand the secret behind these mysterious rituals except in the market.

When we went to be exhibited in the market, a stick would hardly touch us from behind where we were burnt, as it is a very tender area, thus we would run fast like the greatest horse. So through cheating and fraud our prices would soar. Then, after the wounds healed we returned to our lazy state.

I was the luckiest. I was bought by a white-haired old man named `Uzayr. He said to the tradesman, "I want a slow, smart donkey who would carry me to people, help me in my land and may Allah provide both me and him with the means of subsistence."

The tradesman pointed at me and said, "We bought him yesterday for ten gold pieces and we will sell him for seven pieces to you as favor."

`Uzayr paid what the man had asked for without even bargaining. I was surprised at his generosity. I went back home with him and found out when he climbed my back that he was a kind man. He did not carry a stick with him, and he did not poke me in my stomach. He was like a soft breeze passing over my back, so I loved him. I saw him preaching to people on our way back and telling them to follow the Ten Commandments. That was the first time I had ever heard of the Ten Commandments and I did not bother myself with what I had heard.

I lived with `Uzayr. He was married with three children and a little maid that dedicated herself to both his and my service. The maid's name was Hanim and she was generous in feeding me. I knew her from her voice.

I came to have my own room in `Uzayr's house that had a window that had to be closed in the winter because it let in the cold. But, when the summer came we would open the window and it would let in an invigorating breeze. I confess that I completely enjoyed my life with `Uzayr.

My life passed by peacefully but tediously. I ate well, practiced my freedom in love, my weight increased and `Uzayr had two new saddles made for me and I brayed when I saw them saying, "I have two new saddles and I am happy. That is for your information."

I was never overtired with the man. The distances to and from the places he rode me to were short and endurable. When he passed by the village, he would talk to the people about Allah, call them to obey Him, warn them against worshiping the devil and advise them to follow the Ten Commandments. Despite the fact that I had heard the name of the Prophet that the Ten Commandments were brought down upon, I cannot recall his name. My mind sometimes is not focused without any explainable reason. I confess that I noted two things in my master `Uzayr that I never understood; his constant talk about the Day of Judgment and his preaching to people for free. I noticed that he talked a lot about the day when the dead would be resurrected. But I did not understand how that could happen.

Also, I noticed that he worked all day and night without being paid. He preached to people for free. I asked myself how

he was able to feed his family and me. Then, I found out that he had a faraway garden which in order to reach, you had to go through the graveyard. `Uzayr made his living from this garden, and I knew that he intended to go to this garden because he slung two big baskets on my back.

My master `Uzayr entered carrying the two baskets and I realized that we were going on our weekly journey.

And so our journey to the garden began.

I became content and energetic breathing in the pure air. After passing a dirt road we entered upon a green road edged with fields on each side. Then, the road changed into a pale yellow color, which was the most annoying part of the road. We were in a barren area. We completely left the village and voices became vague. I started to walk slowly. We came to the outskirts of the city of the dead and I worried as we were passing the old ruins.

I walked faster when we were passing the graves. My master `Uzayr laughed when he saw that I was trying to pass them as fast as I could. He knew that I was scared of them so he patted and calmed me until we got away from them. My master `Uzayr did not know what I sometimes see next to the graves. We animals have this spiritual insight and can see what people cannot. I saw unmentionable things next to the graves.

After we had traveled a good way, we reached the garden. My body was sweating all over and I was completely tired. So I ran towards the shade, chose a sandy spot, threw myself to the ground and started rolling in the sand.

I had hardly finished rolling when I felt my strength come back to me and I got up feeling energized as if I was just

awakening from a deep sleep. I saw my master filling one basket with grapes and the other with figs.

I knew that it was time for us to go, so I filled my stomach with soft cool grass. This was cheap for me but I would pay for it later.

My master `Uzayr put both the basket of figs and that of grapes on my back and we headed back.

I walked energetically in the beginning then I started breathing with difficulty as the sun was so hot that it seemed as if it had descended from the sky and climbed on my head. Two were riding on my back; my master `Uzayr and the sun. `Uzayr I could handle but the sun was frightening. I had hardly walked a few steps when all my body was swimming in sweat and I am one who hates rivers and swimming in general. I stood and brayed, "The sand is hot, it is very hot, my stomach is full and I am fed up and this is for your information."

My master patted my neck and I resumed walking. We came closer to the graveyard and I saw the shadows of its ruins take the form of a beautiful garden. I ran towards the shade and entered the city of the dead. My master smiled and let me go wherever I pleased. I felt frightfully hot. `Uzayr climbed down, took the fig and grape baskets off my back and sat on the ground.

Everything was worn out from the heat: me, my master, the ruins and the ants of the area. `Uzayr sat down and squeezed some grapes into a bowl and then he broke off some pieces of dry bread and put them in the grapes so his teeth could chew them. I watched him prepare his food in amazement. Human beings eat small proportions of food, and it seemed that my master `Uzayr was also absorbed in his meditations. I noticed

that he was contemplating the ruins, the bones and the deathly silence that surrounded him. Then, I heard him say in amazement as if was assuring himself of Allah's omnipotence ... I heard him say, "*Oh! How shall Allah bring it (ever) to life, after its death?*"

`Uzayr had hardly spoken these words when he was invaded (just like I was invaded) by a sudden deep sleep; a drowsiness that is associated with fever and makes you feel tired to the extent that you decompose into dust.

I slept deeply. It was a sleep that was different from any other. All this occurred before I had even noticed that I had been asleep. I tried to bray and warn my master that if he slept, the squeezed grapes would be spoiled from the heat and then when he woke up he would not find any food to eat. But I could not ... I slept.

I slept a deeply and strangely. Really it was very strange. Usually, in my normal sleep I dream of walking among the bean fields or I dream of meeting my grandfather the zebra or I dream that I am still a little donkey without any burdens or responsibilities. But this sleep, to my surprise, was different. It was a sleep completely devoid of dreams.

Then, I suddenly felt His Presence. I am not talking about my master for I did not see my master `Uzayr or feel his presence. But, I felt the presence of Light. This Light asked my master, "*How long did you remain (dead)?*" I did not hear my master's response nor did I see him. I heard this Light after a moment of silence say, "Nay, you have remained (dead) for a hundred years. Look at your dead donkey `Uzayr ... Look at how his body has decomposed to dust ... Look at what is left of his bones ... Then look at how Allah orders the dead to come back

to life ... Look how the dust seeks the dust and becomes bones and look how they were covered by blood and veins, observe how skin grows over them and how the hair covers the skin. Your donkey is still dead so look at how he awakes from the dead. 'Awaken! O, donkey that has been dead for a hundred years.'"

The last order was directed at me. I was listening to this Light without seeing neither Him nor `Uzayr. As soon as I had heard the order I awoke suddenly from my sleep. I raised my head and found that the weather was nice and all the heat had gone. I did not see anybody except my master `Uzayr. He stood in front of me amazed as if I was coming back from the dead. I got up trembling and tried to bray ... I discovered that my musical voice was still in action.

`Uzayr said while he was examining me and trembling, "*I know that Allah has power over things.*"

My master's food was unspoiled. How could it be that even though we had died for a hundred years and my body had decomposed to dust and the grape juice remained unspoiled! Usually this juice spoils after a couple of hours in the heat!

I saw `Uzayr immersed in deep prayer. He reached out for his food but his emotional state did not allow him to eat more than a mere morsel. After that, he climbed onto my back and steered me towards the village.

This first surprise I encountered on that mysterious day was that there was no longer any village!

I mean the village we had left before we went to sleep in the graveyard. The houses had changed, people's clothing had changed and the donkey bridles had changed ... everything had

changed. I tried to sniff the ground in search of the scent of `Uzayr's home but I could not find its scent. I stood in my place feeling scared. I started to realize what had happened. I realized after we had reached the center of the village that I had died and came back to life. This scared me a great deal. Were it not for `Uzayr, I would have gone mad. This fear was not without reason. For I noticed that the sleep we had slept had separated between me and the donkey kind. When donkeys saw me they did not approach me in a usual friendly way. Instead they brayed in fright and turned away.

`Uzayr announced that he had returned and so the people made fun of him. They said that `Uzayr had gone out a hundred years ago and did not come back. `Uzayr is dead. He said, "I am `Uzayr and Allah has brought me back from the dead after a hundred years ... Where are my grand children?"

They told him where his grand children were and he found the youngest of his grand children sixty years old. This old grand child refused to believe that this aged man was his grandfather. There was only one woman was alive from the people that were there when `Uzayr had left the village ... Hanim our little maid. She was twenty years old when we had left and now she is one hundred and twenty years old. The maid came when she had heard about `Uzayr. She was feeling her way on the road with her stick as she had lost her sight due to old age. I hurried towards her when I smelled her scent, brayed happily and wagged my tail.

It was the only smell I had recognized in the village and the woman said to `Uzayr, "Who is this person that is talking about `Uzayr and remembers him when people have forgotten him?"

Then, she started crying. She said while she was crying, "`Uzayr's prayers were accepted ... So if you are `Uzayr, then pray to Allah to give me back my sight." And so, `Uzayr prayed for her to see again, and the blindness went away and she saw him. She recognized him and yelled out a greeting then threw herself to the ground and kissed his feet while crying.

I cried with her and `Uzayr's grand children said, "`Uzayr had a copy of the Torah in his house and we have been searching for it after he had left but we never found it. If you are `Uzayr, then where is the Torah? Its pages had been lost and torn in the war and we had completely forgotten it."

`Uzayr pointed to his head and heart and said, "I still keep the Torah safely in my heart, and I have hidden a copy in an old tree trunk so let us look for it."

We went to an old forsaken tree that had long weeds growing around it and there `Uzayr put in his hand and brought out the pages of the Torah. The people cried out in surprise.

Amidst the people's excitement with `Uzayr, I was totally forgotten. It was over and I left the scene. Everybody gathered around their Prophet whom Allah had brought back from the dead but they had forgotten me.

I stood by myself away from the people for a good while. I heard one of the Jews whisper to his friend, "`Uzayr is the son of Allah."

My bones trembled from the shock. This compelled me to write my memoirs and testify before the Court of History.

"And this is for your information!"

The Dog of the People of the Cave

﴿And you would have thought them awake, while they were asleep. And We turned them on their right and on their left sides, and their dog stretching forth his two forelegs at the entrance [of the Cave or in the space near to the entrance of the Cave (as a guard at the gate)]. Had you looked at them, you would certainly have turned back from them in flight, and would certainly have been filled with awe of them.﴾

(Al-Kahf: 18)

I am a very loyal creature and it takes very little to satisfy me. Yes, I am the loyal of loyalty! I am content with the minimum of loyalty if offered to me. I am Qitmir, the dog of the people of the cave that slept for three hundred and nine years and after that woke up as if he had slept for only half an hour. I thank Allah for making that happen, for I was on the verge of losing my faith that justice exists on the earth. Many people imagine that dogs are animals interested only in food and barking but this is only an illusion. Many people also think that a dog is something impure; a curse or an insult or something of the sort, to the extent that the human (whom Allah has created

and honored) says to his fellow brother, "You son of ...!" with the intention of despising and insulting him. We dogs do not consider this as an insult, because if a creature is a dog, this does not mean that he has committed an act of disbelief.

It is a matter of destiny for Allah (Exalted and Glorified be He) chooses to create us dogs while choosing others to be humans. If the Almighty wants, He could turn a dog into a human being and vice versa and no one could, in that case, question His Wisdom and Choice. Why then do people treat us badly and mention our name in insults?

I will bark in objection to what is happening.

My bark will say, "This is unjust."

Anyway, this is not the only kind of injustice in which the human being is specialized, for this may be the simplest form of injustice he practices. I have experienced colors and forms of injustice from birth and throughout my life and if it had not been for the miracle that happened to us in the cave I would have kissed justice goodbye.

I was born one sunny day in a remote dump in the city of Afsus. My birth in that place had determined my future for the good. It was a matter of fate that I come out to life as a stray dog and live in an unjust kingdom ... black days! My mother nursed me then died before weaning me. I was stricken by her death.

Let me tell you how my mother died so that you can understand the cruelty of those black days we lived. Afsus was a city whose people worshiped their whims and desires. Its ruler was an atheist and most of its people were men of no character, it is a tragedy to be born in a city where its people are like that, for it

means that you have been born in hell. In such a case you will be subject to injustice even if you are innocent, because if people disbelieve in Allah, then this means that every thing is permissible. After disbelief, one is expected to commit all kinds of sins.

The people of Afsus suddenly decided that our numbers had increased. So they said, "The number of dogs has increased, and they bark all day and night and so we cannot sleep. They eat our food, bite our children and make our temples filthy so we must kill them all."

That was what they said and Allah knows that they were exaggerating, for if each one of them, instead of hoarding all that food in his home till it became spoilt, were to throw us a piece of bread, we would have saved ourselves all that barking and lived with them in peace. What is important is that they had claimed that our barking interrupted their sleep forgetting that their insomnia was due to the barking of their consciences. Anyway, they decided to kill us. Men armed with swords went out to silence our barking. Look! They intended to raise their swords and strike us dogs so that our scream would be slaughtered before its coming out.

I was still an unweaned baby when they entered the dump with their swords raised high. I was sleeping between two stones in the dump, half asleep and half awake ... My mother had hid me along with two of my brothers and went to the market. When she came back, I saw her running and people were running after her while their swords were dripping with blood. The sword came down and chopped my mother's leg off, so she fell bleeding to the ground and barked weakly saying, "Hide well for the people of the city have gone mad and have set out killing dogs."

I saw my mother's brutal killing right before my eyes and I wished right then, despite the traditional enmity between us and wolves, to be a wolf that had a thousand fangs, claws, and souls.

I remained trembling where I was till my mother became still and the men went away. After that, I came out of my hiding place and called to my mother but she did not awaken.

I said to her, "I am hungry and I want to be nursed." But she did not answer. She was lying in a red pool and one of her feet was shaking inconsistently and the rest of her body was still.

In this way I became an orphan before I was even weaned. I faced life alone ... If it had not been for a she-dog that was a friend of my mother and if it had not been for her tender paws, I would not have been speaking to you today. My mother's friend nursed me till I grew up and I took care of her in her old age. I used to bury bones and bread for her, bring out this food for her when she came to visit me and sit watching her eat while wagging my tail.

Allah knows that I fed her when I myself was hungry. I did not feed her because she had nursed me and saved my life when I was little but I fed her out of loyalty to her connection and friendship to my mother (May Allah have mercy on both).

I faced many problems when I got older. I had to go out in pursuit of the sun, daily bread and love. The sun was the only creature that could be named generous in the kingdom, but daily bread was scarce while love was close at hand in a way that makes it utterly tasteless.

It is hard for any creature to imagine the nature of the hard life that stray dogs lead, for one has to contrive how to obtain his

livelihood; how to get away at the right time ... Who knows ... The dog massacre may be repeated at anytime. Each day you sleep in a different dump than the one you slept in yesterday. There is no steadiness, and there is that anonymous, mysterious fear of tomorrow; and there is that constant feeling of being chased. To be always a fugitive means that you shed-off your traits and turn into a bulk of moving fear that is waiting for even the slightest signal of danger to flee. A scary life ... exciting ... but still scary. Amidst this life I came to know a man with whom I was fated to play a role in his life; and he was fated to play a role in mine.

We met and were introduced to each other in one of the dumps. I had noticed that there was a shepherd who took refuge with his sheep in one of the dumps where he left his sheep and prayed. One day I got close to him when he was praying and heard him glorify Allah and call Him the One and the Only Who has no partner.

My instinct told me that I stood before a pious believer. I sat next to him until he finished his prayer and turned to me. Honestly, I did not feel scared of him. He finished his prayer and brought out food and sat down to eat. He had a loaf of bread and a piece of meat. I looked at the piece of meat but could not find any bones in it. I was overcome with despair but in spite of that I wagged my tail. He saw me wag my tail and so took the piece of meat out of his mouth before he ate it and looked at me. I wagged my tail some more then he extended his hand with the piece of meat towards me and asked me gently if I felt hungry.

I wagged my tail even more but I did not move from my place. Who knows? His niceness might be a trap to catch me,

maybe he was making fun of me. "There is no need to get my hopes up," I said to myself.

The shepherd extended his hand with the piece of meat and so I wagged my tail with joy. However, I did not move from my place. I wanted to bite myself to know if I was sleeping or awake. There is no doubt that I was dreaming. I have dreamt of this scene many times. A man sitting and has a piece of meat and bread in his hands, he eats the bread and offers me the meat.

"It is undoubtedly a dream. But the world around me is very hot and my tongue is hanging out of my mouth ... how can someone asleep feel the heat while he is dreaming? Can it be that dreams have come true? " I thought.

The shepherd realized that I did not trust him so he threw me the piece of meat. There were about four meters between him and me the piece of meat flew in the air, I raised my head realizing that I was not dreaming and so I jumped up in the air and caught the gift.

My whole body was dancing ... My tail was dancing ... My mouth was dancing ... My teeth were dancing ... My stomach was dancing ... The sun was dancing ... And the whole universe was dancing. I yelled, "O meat ... how sweet your taste is!"

I said to the shepherd while I was dancing and barking, "Another piece if possible ... this is the first time I have tasted meat in my life."

The shepherd smiled shyly so I realized that the piece of meat that I had eaten was all the food he had. I ran to him and started kissing his feet and smelling his scent. I registered his smell in my mind and swore eternal loyalty to this smell.

The shepherd left and I left behind him. He tried to motion me to go back but I insisted on offering my service to him. I decided to guard him, bark for him, protect his sheep and stay-up at night, so nothing bad would happen to him. He tried to chase me away but I stuck to him. I was surprised to find him heading towards the king's castle. I was pessimistic because of that but I went with him.

As it turned out, he supplied the castle with sheep. That day in the king's castle I met with the love of my life. I met the she-dog of princess Priska. Wonderful ... wonderful. I mean the king's castle from inside. I remembered the dump I live in and compared it to the garden of the castle, and my sense of the division of social classes was deepened ... yes ... I am a cultured dog. We have become cultured in the dumps where we theoretically and practically practice pain.

In the garden of the castle I saw a statue of the city's greatest god, but I suddenly remembered that I had drunk a lot of water so I ran towards the statue, raised my foot and passed water. A black she-dog came out of the garden and barked, with a spoiled, weak bark like those barks that come from castles.

I said to her, "Why are you barking?"

She said, "How dare you ... you know that this is the statue of the greatest god in Afsus, don't you?"

I said to her, "Be he the greatest or the smallest god I had to pass water so there is no need to bark."

She said, "The castle's guards will kill you if they know that you have soiled their god."

I said (whispering), "You are a nice dog and you will not tell anybody. Do you believe in the tales people believe in? They are stupid to worship stones, aren't they?"

She said, "You are the first brave creature I have met in the city ... please register my admiration for you."

I said, "I have registered it, thanks."

She said, "Where do you come from? Why are you so skinny? Your bones are sticking out of your body ... You look funny."

I told her, "I come from the dumps. I have just been employed by the shepherd today. As to the secret behind my thinness, it is malnutrition, people's stinginess, expensive prices and the scarceness of meat. Can you imagine that today was the first time I have ever tasted meat in my life? The shepherd gave me his own share of meat."

She said, "Please do not talk about meat or mention its name in front of me ... I am sick of eating meat everyday and I yearn for a plain bone."

I began to think that she may be a little crazy and so I decided to treat her carefully.

I said, "You said that you eat meat every day ... Is it really true?"

She said, "Yes."

I asked, "Would you have some extra meat with you?"

She said, "My lunch is still sitting on the plate. I have not touched it."

She told me to follow her and so I did till we got to a big plate filled with meat. She pointed to the plate and said, "Be my guest and eat it all."

I said, "I warn you against starting to bark after I eat it and accuse me of theft. I do not want any trouble for the shepherd."

She said, "You are speaking to Nahish, the she-dog of princess Priska ... Shame on you to say what you are saying."

I bowed my head and gobbled down the meat in one gulp. I did not have time to chew for who knows what might happen the next moment. After a blink of an eye the food had disappeared.

She said, "How can you eat so fast ... you are a ravenous eater. I have decided to marry you. I realize that I love you. Can this be love at first sight?"

I told her, "I excuse myself from marriage and thank you for love but I have no place in my heart for love. After laboring hard for your daily bread and using-up all your energy it becomes hard to love. Love is an extravagance that poor people like me cannot afford."

She said (dreamingly), "Brave, thin, ravenous eater and a philosopher I love you even more. Here let me smell you ... You smell like violets."

I told her, "There is a violet tree in the dump. I thought that luxury had stripped your sense of smell."

She said, "My head spins when I see you standing next to me. Indulge me and marry me."

I said running away from her, "I hear my master calling to me ... so sorry." I ran to the shepherd.

The king was shouting at him furiously, "O shepherd I have not seen you even once prostrate to our god. I watched you pass by the god's statue in the garden and saw how you did not prostrate to it ... have you gone mad?"

The shepherd said, "I have poor eyesight my sovereign lord and I did not see your reverend god."

I trembled in my place. What if the king came to know that I had urinated on his statue that he worships?

The king said again angrily, "This is my kingdom and the only god that will be worshiped is what I specify. People have no choice except what I choose. Everyone will be held accountable for even the dreams and thoughts that go through their minds."

The shepherd said, "May Allah guide you to success in your future plans. Six gold pieces for the calves, sheep and goats. I have brought you a fat calf which I hope will warm my lord's stomach."

The shepherd wanted to leave but the king slyly asked him, "O Shepherd, I have noticed that you talk to my minister a lot these days. What can a shepherd and a minister of the king possibly have to share?"

The shepherd trembled and I noticed it ... for his body secreted a scent of fears that I can make out. I realized that the shepherd was threatened by something I did not know. I stood and barked at the king. The shepherd shut me up with a motion of his hand and said to the king, "There is nothing between me and the minister, my king. He wanted ... he wanted ... yes ... I remember now ... he wanted me to supply his house with meat."

The king was surprised and said, "I did not know that the minister wanted meat. He says that he is a vegetarian and does not eat it."

The shepherd regained his calmness and said, "But his family eats meat ... I did not know that the kingdom's minister is a vegetarian."

The king suddenly said, "You can go shepherd."

The king gave him money and we left. The shepherd did not go home directly. He passed by more than one home and knocked softly on their doors. After that, he put a brass collar around my neck and left me in the garden of his home. At midnight the shepherd crept out of his warm bed and I followed him. He left the city heading towards the nearest mountains and I walked behind him. He sauntered into a place located between two mountains and I followed him. There were six men ... some of which I had seen in the king's castle and some I had never seen before. They embraced the shepherd and kissed him, and began their secret discussion.

The shepherd said, "I realized from the king's questions today that he knows about the connection between me and his minister ... It seems that the king suspects something. I think that we should act fast."

One of them said, "The king has gone mad and tomorrow he will start his terrorism."

Another man added, "He has decided to tear to shreds anybody who worships a god other than his gods."

The third man said, "We are all in danger of being slaughtered or stoned."

And a forth asked, "What should be done?"

The shepherd said, "I think we should wait till tomorrow then gather here at the same time. If the king carries out his threats, we will leave the kingdom and migrate. I know of a nearby cave in which we can spend the day and when night falls, we will silently creep out of the city."

The meeting was over and each left alone.

When the shepherd fell asleep, I went to Nahish in the castle and found her waiting. As I was about to leave she said to me, "Give me something my lover to remember you by to the day I die."

I gave her the brass collar around my neck, as it was bothering me and then I left. I did not know that this would be the last time I would see her.

Morning came and the sunshine reflected its light on the bronze swords as they chopped heads off for mere suspicion. The king had decided to convince people of his opinion using his soldiers' swords as a primary convincing device. The city's authorities arrested people and stoned them to death. Then they began to arrange fabricated, unjust trials for them where those already dead people were sentenced to death. If a judge asked where the accused was to be stoned, they would tell him that the king's sword had preceded the justice of the judges. The attendants would admiringly applaud the swift justice of the king, and in this way many heads flew-off, many people were stoned and I found myself in trouble. "The shepherd is in danger of being disclosed and stoned and my own neck would not be safe because I live with him," I thought.

"What should I do? Should I desert him? I would be a pig if I did that. Being a dog, my first trait is loyalty. I will not desert him even if my neck were to be cut into a thousand pieces," I said to myself.

On the contrary, my love for him increased but at the same time my amazement at the city's people increased also. They witnessed the noblest of them being killed without lifting a finger. Events developed fast and we heard a knocking on the shepherd's door so I barked. The shepherd opened the door. Six men entered and among them were two of the king's ministers.

The six men said to the shepherd, "Hurry up! Head to the cave ... there is no time." We followed the shepherd to the cave. The shepherd ordered me to sit at the cave's door from inside and guard them well; and to bark if anybody came near.

I did not want to sleep. This was the first official mission that the shepherd had charged me with and I had to prove my loyalty. I heard one of them say, *"Our Lord! Bestow on us mercy from Yourself, and facilitate for us our affair in the right way!"*

And I heard them further say, "*Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, never shall we call upon any ilah (god) other than Him; if we did, we should indeed have uttered an enormity in disbelief. These our people have taken for worship aliha (gods) other than Him (Allah). Why do they not bring for them a clear authority? And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against Allah. (The young men said to one another), 'And when you withdraw from them, and that which they worship, except Allah, then seek refuge in the Cave, your Lord will open a way for you from His Mercy and will make easy for you your affair (i.e. will give you what you will need of provision, dwelling, etc.).*'"

The men scattered around the cave and slept. My job was to guard them, so I stretched forth my two forelegs in the watching position. I closed one eye and opened the other one and said that I would guard these believers in Allah. Then I found that my open eye was closing by itself.

I fell asleep. I was the first to awaken. I found myself dying with hunger; and my hair had grown to a length that amazed me. "What is this? Could we have slept for a week!" I thought.

I barked to awaken them and when they came out of the cave's door and I saw them in the light I was even more amazed, for their beards had reached their feet and their hair was hanging down their backs to the floor like a bride's veil. They looked terrifying ... I wanted to flee from them except that I had smelled their scent and found that it had not changed.

They started asking each other, "*How long have you stayed (here)? They said, 'We have stayed (perhaps) a day or part of a day.' They said, 'Your Lord (Alone) knows best how long you have stayed (here). So send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the town, and let him find out which is the good lawful food, and bring some of that to you. And let him be careful and let no man know of you. For if they come to know of you, they will stone you (to death or abuse and harm you) or turn you back to their religion, and in that case you will never be successful).'*"

They chose the shepherd to go and I went with him. Honestly, I had almost lost my mind. "What has become of Afsus? What has become of the houses, castles and dumps?" I was preoccupied with all such questions, for there was another city, other clothes and dogs that looked nothing like the dogs I had left before I went to sleep. People started to gather around

the shepherd, pointing at his clothes and whispering, "Is he a new tourist? What is he wearing? Why has his bread grown so? Look at his dog? Look at his hair?"

Dogs went on barking around us, and then fled as if they were chased away by a thousand devils. We entered a restaurant that the people had recommended, to buy some meat and bread. The shepherd put his hand in his pocket and brought out a gold piece from the six that were given to him by the king before we had taken refuge in the cave and slept. As soon as the cashier saw the coin he screamed, "An ancient coin, where did you get it from ... O stranger? Did you find a treasure?"

Throngs of people gathered around the shepherd so I said to myself, "Let us go to Nahish. She is the only one that can tell me the truth." There was another castle in place of the king's castle that I had left behind. Its pillars were the same even though they were chipped and old.

I barked saying, "Nahish ... Where are you?"

A black dog came out saying, "Who is calling to my grandmother from amongst the dead?"

I was filled with surprise, for she was none other than Nahish.

The she-dog said, "I am little Nahish."

I imagined that she was teasing me so I got closer to her but she backed away as if I was a ghost.

She asked, "What do you want from me you strange dog that has come back from the past to the present."

I was losing my patience and said, "O Nahish, why are you philosophizing in such a way? Where has your modesty of old gone? Where is the brightness of your eyes?"

She said smilingly, "Do not mention modesty and the brightness of eyes. Who are you and what do you want?"

I shouted furiously, "So that is the way of it ... you have changed after one day? O, loyalty that has been falsely attributed to dogs, in which treacherous sea do you lie?!"

She said in surprise, "Why do you cry so? I have never even seen you before."

I realized that she had disclaimed me ... "That happens a lot in the world of dogs, " I said to myself.

I felt very hurt and said to her, "You disclaim me after all that has happened? The sky has shattered inside my heart and the stars are falling burnt. The sun has been put out. Has your love for me died before we had even digested our dinner? Thank God that I have not become ruined; have not broken down and have not shaken. I am still breathing; I am still alive because you are still alive ... OWWW ... OWWW."

She was filled with ecstasy and said, "Despite the number of dogs I have known, no dog has ever spoken these words to me in all my life. What have I done to make you howl so? How could I have been disloyal to you while I have only set eyes on you now!"

She moved her neck and I saw the brass collar I had given her.

I said to her, "How can you bear the collar's touch on your neck? Does its brass not burn you? You betray the one who gave you the collar then you are brazen enough to wear it."

She started to back away and said, "Ah, I know your story ... this collar is not mine. It is the collar of princess Priska's she-dog, and she died three hundred years ago. We have inherited it generation after generation. Oh, God, you say you have given it to her. Are you Qitmir? Are you the dog she loved and died while swearing an oath of loyalty to you? Are you!"

I did not hear the rest of her words ... I felt that I was crumbling down to pieces, for the truth had started to dawn upon my mind and suddenly taken-over my being. "Because if Nahish had died three hundred years ago, this means that we have been sleeping for more than three-hundred years." I sank into deep thought.

Something inside me trembled and I started to think and understand ... The worshiped statue of the god in Afsus is no longer here and this means that belief has won. Could it be that we have been sleeping for three hundred years in order to discover this reality? For me Nahish was gone; lost; dead and that is all the situation meant to me.

I started to cry and I buried my head in the ground and howled.

Nahish's granddaughter got closer to me and said, "O God, do you love her to this extent? I thought that you were talking to me. I thought that you were flirting with me. Why did my heart flutter so when I saw you? Can love continue despite time? Why are you not talking to me? Your avoidance of me is killing me. I am prettier than my grandmother Nahish. Look how my hair is fashionably cut."

Her words were entering my mind and became intertwined with the sound of my crying.

Nahish's granddaughter put her head on my chest and said, "Try to forget her. Look at me and try to forget her."

I pushed her away and returned to the cave. Nahish's granddaughter called out to me; barked lovingly to me; begged and wagged her tail, but I was drowned in a well of deep despair and dark sadness. "Nahish has gone ... I will not hear her voice after today. I will not smell her scent. Her eyes will not shine with love," I thought.

I imagined that the city's roads were sobbing. The city's dogs chased after me. They barked and then fled frightened. My loneliness and despair increased and I found that my feet could hardly carry me back to the cave. I pushed myself until I got there. I saw that the people of the cave had suffered what I had suffered. They were exchanging inconsistent conversation interposed with strange silences.

I ran to the shepherd, threw myself at his feet and cried, "O shepherd, you are the only one I have in this world. Nahish has gone ... she is dead."

The shepherd patted my head with his hand. My head was spinning.

I heard the shepherd ask the minister, "How long did they say we have been in this cave?"

The minister said, "Three-hundred and nine years."

The shepherd asked, "How could we have slept for so long?"

The minister said. "It is Allah's Will."

The shepherd then said happily, as if he had discovered something, "Allah has shown us what happens to those who do not believe in Him."

The minister said, "You have said the truth, shepherd. The king was defeated and his gods were deposed. Who would have imagined that?"

One of them said, "Now we know which of the two parties was best at calculating the term of years they had tarried!"

One of them said, "Let me tell you something. I felt alienated from the town. I returned to the cave as one returning to his home. My wife and children have died and my grandchildren's grandchildren never knew me."

His tragedy reminded me of my own, so I howled ... I remembered the old Nahish and started comparing her with her granddaughter's granddaughter and my sadness at the lost of the old one increased. Many voices approached the cave so I forgot my sadness, jumped to the cave's door and barked.

The city's new king, his ministers and court were at the head of the people of Afsus. They approached the cave holding olive branches and flowers in their hands. To my surprise Nahish's granddaughter was with them.

As soon as I saw the crowd, I barked hard twice so they all stopped. The king pointed at me, "They have a dog with them. How strange!"

One of his ministers said, "The dog slept along with these righteous men for three-hundred and nine years." I barked again so they stood frozen in their place. One of the guards raised his sword in order to scare me but my barking only increased.

The king blocked his guard's hand and said, "Do not touch this blessed dog ... he has been sleeping with them all this while.

We do not kill dogs without fault. Whoever believes in Allah does not harm His weakest creatures."

I realized that justice had made its way back to the earth and so I stopped barking. When faith in Allah prevailed, justice accompanies it.

The king cried out, "O pious men, will not any of you come out? Afsus's king is addressing you."

The shepherd came out and his companions came out behind him.

The king, his ministers, his court and the people bowed to us.

The king said, "O blessed men, we want to hear your story."

I know the story so I went and sat at the cave's door. Nahish's granddaughter came and said to me, "Why are you sitting here alone? Do you still remember her?"

I said, "I have only slept for one night. How can I forget in one night?"

She said, "You have been sleeping for many years."

I said, "My eyes went to sleep while my heart remained wide awake, so how can I forget."

She said, "You are a philosopher, Qitmir."

I whispered, "She used to call me a ravenous eater and a philosopher."

Nahish's granddaughter said, "What are you saying?"

"Never mind," I said.

She said, "I see that you are averting your head away from me."

I said, "My heart is still drawn to her."

She said, "Loyalty is your trait ... but this loyalty is hurting my heart. Can it be that you are not a dog anymore."

I said, "I do not know. We have died and have not died. We have slept but how can we sleep for three hundred and nine years. I have closed my eyes and opened them and found another era, another city and another people. When Allah's miracle befalls, it makes your head and heart spin. I do not feel that I belong to the species of dogs any more. Every time they see me ... they flee."

She said, "I have not fled from you. It is you who are fleeing from me."

I said, "We come down to the same result and alienation is still there. Their running away from me is the reason I run away from you. Sleeping in the cave separates us. I no longer belong to your era my barking companion."

I was separated from this era when I closed my eyes in the cave. I belong to history now. I, a mere simple creature, have become a miracle of Allah. I am trembling from alienation; from wonder and from the greatness of the whole situation. I do not deny that though my sadness for your grandmother Nahish is increasing, my happiness is also increasing. My happiness is born but why now. Can it be that I am on my way to her."

I imagined that we were entering the cave once more in order to really sleep this time. I imagined that Nahish was there in that wonderful dark spot.

I threw myself into the darkness of light.

`Isa and the Clay

﴾(Remember) when Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection), 'O `Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Remember My Favor to you and to your mother when I supported you with Ruh-ul-Qudus [Jibril (Gabriel)] so that you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and when I taught you writing, Al-Hikmah (the power of understanding), the Tawrat (Torah) and the Injil (Gospel); and when you made out of the clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My Permission, and you breathed into it, and it became a bird by My Permission.'﴿

(Al-Ma'idah: 110)

In the beginning I was clay then I became a bird by Allah's leave. From motionless clay to a soaring bird. I was something that was not able to move by itself and then I could fly in the sky. That is me.

I do not know how to introduce myself to history.

Allah (Exalted and Glorified be He) introduced me in the last of His Books saying, *"(Remember) when Allah will say (on the Day of Resurrection), 'O `Isa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)! Remember My Favor to you and to your mother when I supported you with Ruh-ul-Qudus [Jibril (Gabriel)] so that you spoke to the people in the*

cradle and in maturity; and when I taught you writing, Al-Hikmah (the power of understanding), the Tawrat (Torah) and the Injil (Gospel); and when you made out of the clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My Permission, and you breathed into it, and it became a bird by My Permission.'"

That is me.

A handful of clay ...

I was the princess of clay, even though I was made of clay. Then I fell in love. That was before `Isa the son of Maryam touched me. When I fell in love I began to transform.

How can a creature explain the scent of the earth that was originally the sky?

I was calm, still and content with my state of being a lump of clay. I do not dream, for clay does not have the ability to do this. Even though I could not dream, I was content. I had a long history before I became earthly clay. At first, I was a part of the sun. Then billions of years passed by and I had not yet fallen in love, so the burning embers were put out and I was transformed into rock on a planet they call the earth in a place they call Palestine.

I am a part of the mud of Palestine and a part of its land. Look how much I had suffered. Thousands of years passed by without falling in love.

I used to drink water, become satisfied and help scented flowers to grow even without enjoying love. It is the instinct of clay to be watered so we can grow flowers. One seed is enough for me to make what amazes both mind and heart. Through all this, I remained as I was, just simple earthly clay.

I did not see beyond the space taken by my atoms. Clay does not see with eyes for it does not have eyes. Sometimes I see things through a worm or a flower. I do not know what goes on around me; I do not know what happens on top of me. But, sometimes I feel happy and at other times I become sad.

The earth is sometimes happy and sometimes sad, even though it does not have a heart or feelings. Ah! This is one of the mysteries of clay and I do not know how to tell people about it. It is all right. I am not inclined to talk about myself but now I have the desire to do so. Is not a lover allowed to speak about his beloved?

When I fell in love, I, a simple piece of clay, fell in love with myself. I had heard about `Isa before he was born. I saw him after he became a Prophet. Moreover. because of him I experienced the miracle of being transformed from clay into a soaring bird. I was a piece of clay in the garden that was right next to the Aqsa Mosque. On her way to prayer in the Mihrab (the place of worshiping), Maryam used to pass by me without stopping. I tried uselessly to get Maryam's attention but I could not. I gave it a lot of thought but I could not do anything.

Then one day a little rose bush grew from my mud. The bush was merely a green stem that had not yet turned dark green. I was surprised one day when Maryam stopped and looked at the rose bush. I tried hard to get her attention but I could not and amidst my confusion and sadness I sighed and a small bud opened in the bush.

Then, the virgin Maryam turned her face around and contemplated the miracle of the newly opened bud. That day Maryam watered me and the satisfaction I felt was different

from the feeling I got when watered by rain. For, the water she watered me with, was the same water that she drank from. The water was sweet and scented with lemons and there was a heavenly taste to it. From that day forward, I never felt thirsty again. And I fell in love with Maryam. She was my first love.

For sure, a lover is allowed to speak about his beloved, isn't he? I want to describe Maryam to you. O! I do not think that I can, for I did not see her well. I just saw the part of her face that was directly in front of me. Her face was pleasant and filled with nobleness. Moreover, her eyes reflected a look that swayed between the amazement of innocence and the beauty of pure spontaneity. Her face was like a dream. It was like a flowing river. Because I was unable to dream, I fell in love with her face twice. Once because it is her face and once because I do not dream. Even though I could not dream, my love for her was deep, calm and silent.

"Ah! If only I possessed the bird's ability of expression. Ah! If only I were a bird that could sing," I used to think in this way.

One day a bulbul stood on my mud and sang a short song that sounded like a group of stars had joined together in cosmic harmony. At that time I wished I were a bulbul to sing long at her feet ... I mean at the feet of Maryam.

Among the wonders of love is that you do not know why you fall in love. Then, your love increases and you know why it increases, while the original reason of falling in love, remains a mysterious secret never to be revealed. So I did not know the reason behind my love for Maryam. Then, one day my love for her increased and I knew why, *"(And (remember) when the angels said, 'O Maryam (Mary)! Verily, Allah has chosen you, purified you*

(from polytheism and disbelief), and chosen you above the women of the 'Alamin (mankind and jinn) (of her lifetime).'"

I understood then that I fell in love with the one, whom Allah had crowned a princess from among the women of the worlds ... And I understood the reason for her purity that made the moon seem like a faded candle.

My love for Maryam increased ... For how could particles of mud resist falling in love with something of such value.

The angels once again addressed Maryam, *"O Maryam! Submit yourself in obedience to your Lord (Allah, by worshiping none but Him Alone) and prostrate yourself, and Irka'i (bow down etc.) along with Ar-Raki'in (those who bow down etc.)."*

Thus she was ordered after receiving the glad tidings to increase her submission to Allah, to prostrate to Allah, to bow down (in prayer) to Allah and to worship Him devoutly. I was happy on her behalf but sad for myself, for Maryam forgot me for a year as she became busy performing prayer. When Maryam prayed, the amount of universal nobleness increased and satanic disobedience and rebellion in comparison, seemed like a handful of ashes, whose flames have died out. Ah! Maryam forgot me for a long time. She was busy with prayer but I waited for her everyday. It was a kind of torture to wait. Moreover, I did not find anybody to complain to except the rosebush. The rosebush had now turned into a rose tree.

I said to the rose tree, "The virgin Maryam has forgotten us."

The rose tree did not say anything.

I again said, "Maybe she has not forgotten us."

The rose tree remained silent. The wind blew so that one of the roses moved and a drop of water fell from its white petals. I did not know if this was rain from the sky or if it was the rose crying ... I did not know. All I knew was that the drop of water was the only answer that the tree gave during our conversation.

At the same time, I imagined that Maryam cried while she was praying and I was filled with muddy conviction that Maryam's tears were what had made the rose cry. The amount of my love for Maryam increased as I waited for her; and increased as the rose tree grew. Moreover, it seems that love filled me with fertility that I never realized existed in me and so dozens of rose trees were born.

All of us waited for the Virgin. Then, one day a cosmic event occurred. The sun shone and dried up all my mud, and rain clouds passed over me without stopping. I cracked from thirst. However, my thirst to see the princess that Allah crowned upon all the women of the worlds was stronger than my thirst for water. Finally, the sun descended towards its mysterious bed in the west and night came. It was a hot summer's day and the thirst of the roses increased, and so the smallest one leaned towards me and said, "I am going to die of thirst. Should I start my journey towards wilting?"

When the rose asked me, I did not reply as I did not know what to say. I prayed a short prayer to Allah to save us from thirst. Before I finished my prayer, Maryam ran towards me holding a jug of water that was spilling as she hurried. Maryam remembered me suddenly after her prayer, and so she came just at the right moment. Maryam watered me and I silently drank the water then pushed it towards the stems of my bushes and made sure that they drank.

Then, suddenly a great universal event occurred. I felt it when the angel's foot trod upon the ground. Jibril (the master of angels) descended and stood right in front of Maryam. I sensed his presence before Maryam even saw him. Actually, despite the fact that I am mere mud, we feel, sense and react to Allah's Miracles before humans do. When Jibril descended, the particles of my mud were filled with a desire to fly and the flowers raised their white heads and looked at him in wonder.

After a few moments, Maryam saw him. At first, she was surprised but when she gazed at his face she realized that she did not know him. For, Jibril took the form of a human being but his splendor shone like a ray of light from his human disguise. Maryam felt scared, so she sought Allah's protection. She thought he was a strange man that had crept up upon her when she was alone.

Feeling afraid, she said, *"Verily! I seek refuge with the Most Beneficent (Allah) from you, if you do fear Allah."*

The Lord's angel Jibril smiled at her so as to put her fears to rest.

He quietly answered her, *"I am only a Messenger from your Lord."*

When Maryam felt reassured, the Lord's angel told her why he had descended to the earth. He said, *"(To announce) to you the gift of a righteous son."*

Maryam became happy but her happiness was shattered before it even began. She remembered that she was a virgin. No human had touched her. She was not married ... How could she give birth?!

These thoughts flew through Maryam's head like scared birds.

She asked the Honest Spirit, *"How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste?" He said, "So (it will be), your Lord said, 'That is easy for Me (Allah) and (We wish) to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allah), and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allah).'"*

In our worldly life, there are statements that carry great meaning and what Jibril said to Maryam that day is one of these phrases. He said to her, *"It is a matter (already) decreed."*

He wanted to put an end to a long discussion that would result from Maryam's astonishment after discovering that she would be pregnant and would give birth by Allah's Decree.

Maryam was a virgin who had been given as a servant to al-Aqsa Mosque by her family. It was her honor and glory that she was a virgin and at the service of al-Aqsa mosque. "How can a virgin give birth? What will people say? How will she be able to defend herself in an evil world that does not believe in Allah's Miracles or His Ability?" I thought.

Being a piece of mud I did not know what Maryam's feelings, worries or thoughts were. No one save Allah knew. That was why the Lord's angel told her, *"It is a matter (already) decreed."* He put an end to her fears or in other words, ordered her not to think about it as it was a matter already decreed by Allah.

So, Maryam's task then was to channel her thoughts and inquires towards something else. She had to surrender to the decreed matter. At that time Maryam had to surrender and be

optimistic and happy, for Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He) has willed that she be purified and above the women of all the worlds, and has willed that she be the mother of a gracious Prophet by a Word from Allah.

The Lord's angel blew in the air and so the Miracle occurred and the virgin became a mother carrying a sign from Allah. *"It is a matter (already) decreed."*

Maryam repeated this sentence after the angel disappeared and then she ran fast towards her Mihrab forgetting the jug she had drunk from, that she came to water us with. I loved Maryam the virgin mother more than I loved Maryam the virgin. My love for her flourished with my love for the baby of Allah's Will.

Days and months passed by. I saw Maryam a lot. At a short distance from me there was a lot of tall palm trees and the virgin mother used to walk from the east spot where my mud lay to the palm trees that were only a few steps away. She used to stand for a long time at the palm trees or sit on the grass or praise Allah or remain silent and pale. Then, one day the pains of childbirth came to her while she was sitting next to the trunk of a palm tree.

She said amidst her pain, *"Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!"*

Despite Maryam's tremendous faith, and despite Allah's Choice of her; and despite His Will that she carried His Signs to humans despite all this glory, the virgin had more cause to worry than to be reassured. This was simply human anxiety, that I understood very well. Maryam belonged to a human society not an angelic one. She was subjected to human laws. It is a part of

these laws that a woman should not give birth except if she is married. So, if Maryam claimed that she did not get married and then gave birth, this would be a proof of her being unchaste.

That is no small and trivial problem. The virgin would be accused of being unchaste. What a sacrifice given by those humans who are chosen by Allah! The sacrifice in their case begins with honor, and then ends with their bodies being hammered with nails, sawed or stabbed treacherously from the back.

Maryam was the purest woman on the earth and despite that, her whole society repeated these words, *"O sister (i.e. the like) of Harun (Aaron) [not the brother of Musa (Moses), but he was another pious man at the time of Maryam (Mary)]! Your father was not a man who used to commit adultery, nor your mother was an unchaste woman."*

Maryam thought about this sentence before she gave birth and it tortured and astonished her, for she did not choose what had happened to her, but rather it was a matter already decreed by Allah. That was what the Lord's angel had told her.

When she felt the pains of childbirth she uttered words of human weakness. She said, *"Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!"*

What torture made her say these words! For sure, it was a torture that exceeded human capacity of endurance. On the outside it was a torture, but tender mercy and Divine Glory were at its core.

Maryam said those words while she was giving birth. She was surprised by the coming of the baby and saw in her mind

what she would endure at the hands of the people of her society and as she thought about that, she returned to human weakness and wished that she was a thing forgotten and out of sight. At the same time, a voice cried out from beneath the palm-tree, *"Then [the babe `Isa or Jibril] cried unto her from below her, saying, 'Grieve not! Your Lord has provided a water stream under you. And shake the trunk of date palm towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe-dates upon you. So eat and drink and be glad, and if you see any human being, say: Verily! I have vowed a fast unto the Most Beneficent (Allah) so I shall not speak to any human being this day.'"*

The situation was over and the virgin's abstinence from talk began. She went out with the child and came back to her people carrying him. Then, the gossip started and the Jewish community talked about nothing except the virgin that had given birth. The evil of the Jewish community surpassed the incredible phenomenon of what had just happened. Their mouths were filled with mud that filled the atmosphere.

I represented the earth and my children, I mean the roses, represented plants ... and together we were witnesses to Maryam's chastity and innocence. We were not the only witnesses, for the whole universe was a witness to her innocence. Moreover, the Lord of the universe knows everything. Despite that, Maryam went through some hard times. Nevertheless, deep down the Jewish community knew that Maryam was innocent but its hypocrisy made it accuse her.

Even though I am just earthly mud, I can understand this strange phenomenon. When a certain society suffers from decadence, it refuses to believe that purity and chastity of any kind existed. Furthermore, this society itself stands against any

kind of purity and chastity. When purity exists in its most elevated form, it hurts the feelings of hypocrisy and corruption ... and corruption therefore draws its weapons and wages war. No war is easier to wage than a war of debase gossip.

Then something occurred that should have put an end to the whole situation or was supposed to do that. However, this occurrence did not succeed in stopping the soiled tongues.

Maryam came back carrying `Isa (peace be upon them) and her people asked the very same question that had gone through her mind when she wished that she was dead, *"O sister (i.e. the like) of Harun (Aaron) [not the brother of Musa (Moses), but he was another pious man at the time of Maryam (Mary)]! Your father was not a man who used to commit adultery, nor your mother was an unchaste woman."*

She remembered what `Isa said to her so she pointed to him. They understood that she had made a vow of silence, but now their astonishment increased. How could they talk to a child that was new born! The head of the priests said to Maryam, *"How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?"*

Then, the miracle happened and `Isa talked! He said, *"Verily! I am a slave of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me Salat (prayer), and Zakat, as long as I live. And dutiful to my mother, and made me not arrogant, unblest. And Salam (peace) be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!*

Despite this decisive miracle the war of gossip still circulated around Maryam, for the Jewish society continued telling this

story after failing to mention the miracles in it. But, both my feeling of pain and my love for Maryam and `Isa increased. In spite of the fact that I am mere mud and despite of my simple rank in the worldly life, I feel pain and love and also feel happy or sad.

Days passed by and I did not see Maryam anymore. Maryam forgot the jug in which she had brought us water. She forgot it in a place close by me. "O Allah! How can she drink then?" I thought. I missed hearing about Maryam and her great son.

Then, one day some guards of the Roman ruler Herod passed by me and with them was an investigator that seemed to be from the Intelligence Agency.

This man asked a lot of questions.

The man looked at the rose bushes, the vineyard and the palm trees. He ordered a table to be set up next to my ground and he sat and asked everyone, "What is the story of the child that talked in its infancy? What is the story of the gossip that says that he is the savior that will save his people? Who are his people? From whom will he save them? Will he save them from Rome? Is there a conspiracy against Rome? Will a baby still wrapped in a blanket lead this conspiracy? Is this baby just a cover for older men who are the planners of this conspiracy? Who are they?"

The questions of the investigator showered upon the priests and friars of the temple and everyone who was in the market, as well as anyone who had heard, seen or even imagined that he had heard or seen something about it. It was obvious that the situation had irritated the Roman authorities. Moreover, the

people realized that the state's hand was moving and about to strike. So, they hid the whole story and completely denied it.

One of the priests answered the investigator saying, "Do you believe sir, that a baby can be born without a father?" He answered the second question saying, "Do you believe sir, that an infant can talk?"

The investigator raised his head and said, "Priest, just answer my questions. I have not come here for you to ask me and I answer you."

The investigator's voice suddenly became harsh. The priest felt scared of the investigator's harshness and said, "Mr. Investigator, you are asking me about illusions and dreams. I do not believe that a virgin gave birth and that her baby talked. No one believes this superstitious tale. They have bothered you sir without excuse."

The Roman investigator felt depressed that he left Rome and came to Palestine pursuing illusions. The Jewish priest's words convinced him for they were logically correct. The people heard about the investigator and told each other to completely hide the story of the Christ that was born by a Word of Allah, and who talked only moments after his birth. That was the safest thing to do due to the hard circumstances of that time. All the people denied what they had seen with their eyes and heard with their ears. The investigator was contented with the results, gathered his paperwork and returned to Rome.

The investigator disappeared and I did not see him again.

Two days after the disappearance of the investigator, Maryam appeared once again. She carried her son in her arms

and walked in the darkness of the night. She stopped every few steps and looked around. The Lord's angel appeared to her and ordered her to travel to Egypt. She said she was afraid of traveling but the angel reassured her and explained to her that all the people who carry a message, leave their home for sometime.

In this way Maryam left and I did not know anything about her for years. I loved Egypt just as I loved Maryam and her son the miracle of Allah. I knew that Egypt's mud was tender to them and sheltered them and I felt that the land of Egypt loved them as much as I did.

Years passed by and the Jewish community reached the peak of its hypocrisy. There was a facade that they had to keep up and an inside reality that was completely full of evil actions. The Law was strictly applied and injustice prevailed and became the law of life. There were seven levels to purity and twenty-six prayers that had to be said while washing hands before eating food. There was nobody that was pure in the whole society and prayer became mere rituals. The prayer had become devoid of its content, it had neither connection nor submission to Allah. Priests were being bribed and they distorted the Torah; they left a part in and took a part out. The priests sold sacrifices of birds and doves that would redeem people of their sins, as they falsely thought, for a lot of money and so became rich at the expense of the poor worshipers. A kind of intellectual bartering prevailed in society. The minds were corrupted and so were the bodies.

From the outside there was a kind of fanaticism in the way religious texts were applied and that was in turn met with a horrible looseness in the attention given to the soul of religion.

In this way the Jewish community's facade was made up of a human system that was completely worn out from the inside. The only value that was worshiped at that time was gold or money in general. The importance of the soul was cancelled from the dictionary of values to the extent that Jews thought that a creature's blood was his soul.

`Isa was a human that came by a Word of Allah and His Spirit. The aim of his call was to elevate the Word of Allah and the spirit of the true religion.

All his miracles were connected to the soul. He gave life and death. Does this not revive the spirit of the one who died and prove the existence of the soul (or spirit) and the existence of resurrection? His miracle with me (the mud) was also connected to the soul. `Isa (pbuh) wanted to destroy the concept of physical existence as a superior form of life. For this reason he fed thousands from just one fish. He wanted to tell people about the reality of the soul as it fills up the form of the body. This form does not become greedy except if it loses consciousness of the soul. If the soul fills the body, thousands could be satisfied by one fish.

Then, came my turn.

People think that if a person died and returned to the earth, it would be impossible to be resurrected. They thought that life was over, and the soul is lost with the blood and so all was gone.

People talked to `Isa about this and he calmly listened to their ignorance. Then one day `Isa sat next to the rose tree and a big crowd gathered around him. They talked to him about the soul and showed their suspicion of the value that `Isa imagined

about the soul. `Isa looked around him then bent down to the ground and held a piece of clay that was me in his noble hands. I was raised from the ground for the first time in my life. `Isa listened to what they said while he pressed me. I felt that his pressure filled me with something new. `Isa raised the piece of clay in his hands and asked those around him, "What is this?"

The people replied, "This is a piece of earthly clay."

`Isa asked, "Can this piece of clay fly in the sky?"

They answered, "No! It cannot!"

He asked them why it could not, but they did not answer.

`Isa explained, "Because it is void of soul. If I formed it into a bird and blew into it asking Allah to put a soul in it, would it then not fly?" While `Isa spoke he formed me into a bird and when he finished, he blew at my body and I turned into a bulbul and flew away looking at `Isa and the crowd that had gathered around him. I started singing and I spread my wings and flew ... What pleasure for one to be a bird that can fly up to the sky. `Isa was talking as I was getting farther away. I will fly to Maryam. I want to sing at her feet for a long time. The scene was getting smaller each time I went higher in the sky.

O Allah! I am getting higher and higher.

The Elephant and Abrahah

﴾*Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?*﴿

(Al-Fil: 1)

There is no question that the word "block" is always accompanied with fear. It may be a block of stones, of rock, or even a block of animal flesh. Whenever such a fear-inspiring block manifests itself in front of small creatures, it makes them shrink because they fear death. There is surely no creature on the earth that can be compared with the elephant in its size and weight. I am not arrogant just because I am king-sized. However, I do not deny that vanity fires the first shot of my power when I rush to attack with the block of my body that pushes a similar mass of air making my enemy retreat as the force of air drives him back. So, it is by the force of air and not my own strength that overcomes my enemy.

How strange the feeling of power is! Any simple mind like that of the elephant should be intoxicated by having such power. Unfortunately, I have lived most of my life being elated and inebriated under the impact of my power, but at the point where I reached the highest level of intoxication, I sobered up.

I will not start from the end of the story.

I became giddy whenever the trees of the forest bowed in front of me with their broken branches, making way for my massive body. I used to become giddy when people pointed at me saying, "Here is the elephant of Abrahah ... Look at his magnificent power!"

My power became a myth that overcame the sight of all creatures before my coming. It was that power that lay behind the supremacy of the power of Abrahah's army. I know that the name Abrahah will find its way into history as a symbol of hatred and stubbornness. Moreover, I know that this name is so trivial to be mentioned in Allah's Book. That is why Allah has referred to Abrahah by attributing him to me. Allah has passed his name by, while He has mentioned mine ... *"Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?"*

The above-mentioned companions of the elephant constitute the regime of Abrahah and I am the aforesaid elephant to whom they are attributed. Do you see how Allah has attributed a human being to an animal? This means that the animal is higher in rank than man. There is no escaping that I am better than Abrahah. He was a disbeliever while I am an animal by nature. Man occupies the highest rank among all creatures on the earth, but when he disbelieves in Allah, he loses his merit and becomes lower in rank than the animals. The animal, at that time, is preferred even by the dust of the earth.

I do not want to become intoxicated by my power.

Abrahah was a king, who ascended a throne made of fear and gold. Behind that throne, there stood many slaves throwing out currents of air by way of fans made of ostrich quills. Moreover, every thing used to bow before that throne; the

crowns of men, the souls of people and the eminent men of the army. I was the only one who did not bow in front of that throne. I refused to do so ... They whipped me for a year to make me bow before it but I insisted on refusing. I was not acting obstinately or trying to challenge Abrahah, even though he thought so, but I was responding to the freedom I have by nature. The branches of the trees bow down before me, but I do not bow down in front of kings. It is for this reason that I was created by Allah.

The forest has taught me not to bow down before anyone.

My childhood was a paradise full of innocence. I remember a dream of dense trees, long grass and many ant houses. My childhood was spent in one of the many forests of Africa and at the same time it became my dream. I was the son of an elephant whose work was to pull the greatest tree out of the forest. My father was running when he clashed with the trees. Then he went back, rolled out his huge ears, raised his tail out of rage, bent up his trunk and burst forth like a bat out of hell towards the tree. He implanted his ivory tusk like a knife into the wooden flesh of the tree, enwrapped it with his trunk, and pulled it out making a loud sound. The tree was plucked out with a block of mud containing the tree's deeply set roots. Water burst out from the hole that previously contained the roots of the tree. My mother came along after the loud bang. My father commanded her to bathe in the water of the hole made by his power. As she bathed, the destroyed tree with its dark bark and its vanquished surrender, looked at my mother.

My father was a king beyond comparison. Even lions were afraid of him. I was the only one who did not feel afraid of him.

I felt that my small block was the developing image of his huge one. Moreover, I know that his power would decline when he reached old age. At that time, it would be brought into my body. My father was able to defeat everything but happily he let me conquer him while he was laughing.

Then one day my father died ...

He felt that he was going to die ... And before he started his journey into the elephants' graveyard, he summoned me and said, "I am going to leave and I will not come back again."

I asked him, "Why will you not return?"

He said, "Do not ask me such silly questions. Look, this may be the last time I talk to you ... So listen carefully to my words."

"I listen to you father but you have a muddy mood today," I commented.

He said, "It is the end that makes me muddy. My power is running out of my body ... I have lived as an upright elephant and I am going to die also as an upright one."

"I do not understand you my father," I said.

He continued, "I did not employ my power to serve the purpose of an aggressor ... This is righteousness in which we believe." My father went on to say, "I did not do injustice to anyone, I did not strike anyone, I did not pull out a tree without a clear reason as when it stood as an obstacle on my way. Really, I feel satisfied with myself, but I saw a strange dream about you last night. Do not ask me what it is? Just remember these words as you will face a situation in which you have to choose. When such a moment takes place, you must choose righteousness."

"I do not understand you my father. What is the dream you have seen?" I asked.

He replied, "It is not important that you understand me ... But the most important thing is to remember these words someday."

Then, my father turned around and burst forth towards the darkness of the forest. From that time onwards, he never returned.

My father died and I became the king of the forest but I forgot his advice as I led a busy life and was preoccupied with the vanity of power. Days passed by while I was intoxicated with victories.

One day, humans of small size, cold appearance and foolish facial features came to the forest and went on digging the ground and flattening it. We, elephants, did not understand why they did this, and so they caught us. At that time, I realized that Allah has honored this weak creature called man over us. They dug the ground of the forest and covered the hole to seem safe. Then when I walked upon it, I fell down with my huge block into the trap set by man. That is how I was caught. In the beginning, I went crazy. I went on hitting the net but it responded to my strikes and extended without being cut.

Then, a long journey of torture started and ended in a strange castle. In a room built of hard stones, they imprisoned me. A short, evil man came to me the next day surrounded by many soldiers and ministers who looked like servants. They constantly bowed before him. They told him that they had caught me thanks to his instructions. They were flattering, glorifying and even worshiping him all the time.

One of them pointed at me saying, "This is the mightiest elephant in the forest. He is the king of the forest and he is going to be the servant of Abrahah and a soldier in his army."

I did not understand how I could be a soldier in the army. I raised my trunk and let it fall on the air making a loud bang. At that moment, Abrahah moved backwards like a cowardly child. Then his servants, ministers and leaders became very angry and their whips fell down upon my body ... In the beginning, I resisted with the help of my thick skin, but with the increasing strength of the strikes, I began to feel pain and so I withdrew.

The evil Abrahah said, "Do not strike him. Starving is better than beating ... Discipline him by starvation." Then he went out and his servants followed in his steps.

I did not understand the reason behind the king's anger. Did he become angry because I had displayed his cowardice in front of his suite who worshiped him? I did not know why that dwarf wanted to starve me. He looked smaller than my nose. My trunk is bigger than him and more venerable. I realized his evilness under the impact of hunger. To be struck by lashes is more bearable than the cruelty of hunger. An elephant like me should eat a ton of food per day.

I was starved into submission and then I became an employee of Abrahah. I was about to die of starvation and so I became a coward. From that time onwards, I used to raise my trunk in reverence to Abrahah whenever I saw him. His servants taught me how to greet the tyrant by starving me out. Damn them all.

Starvation taught me what I had not learned from lashes. I was free in the forest. My sustenance did not surrender to the

will of anyone. When I lost my freedom however, I lost my dignity as well as the taste of food itself. No doubt, most of my problems in the forest were in the form of a constant struggle with creatures and monsters, aiming to achieve supremacy. I do not deny that I had my problems concerning food and at times I suffered, but everything can be endured in the presence of freedom. Sometimes, we lose freedom while enjoying the availability of food and security, and then it seems that all our problems have disappeared forever, but do you think that we elephants feel happy?

After my experience in jail, I realized that nothing is equal to freedom. Moreover, I realized something even more important, that is, to lose freedom means losing the ability to love and the ability to enjoy the real taste of bread. Later on, I will tell you how I discovered these two matters. I do not want to start from the end.

Abrahah's servants started their cruel policy of starving me out. They aimed at compelling me to surrender and they succeeded. They trained me how to greet the king. They gave me an amount of food equal to the degree to which the king liked my greeting. They trained me to attack human beings, fortresses and each time I got food as long as I obeyed orders.

It was this connection between obeying them and obtaining food that made me their servant. I no longer made decisions for myself. I was no longer innocent or free. I became a gigantic power under the control of others whose lowness had reached its climax by disbelieving in their Creator. But how could I know that they would lead me into tragedy?

As an elephant, I know nothing but attack and destruction. I did not know whether it was right to attack or whether the place assigned to destruction deserved it or not. A soldier does not ask why he attacks. He asks only about the time at which he is going to attack. So, I was not allowed to ask.

And so, my misfortune led me to a tragedy as I was not permitted to ask ... As a power that had no freedom, I had to obey. My real tragedy lurked in the fact that I was obeying a tyrant and a fool at the same time, or in other words, a fool who was tyrant in his foolishness. Tyranny and foolishness are two characteristics that can lead to man's downfall and miserable end.

Let me start my story. The beginning of the story itself is the beginning of the tragedy.

The tragedy started when Abrahah received news about the Arabs' glorification of a building called the Ka`bah and how they go on pilgrimage to it. Breaking such news to Abrahah had saddened him. So he gathered his ministers and engineers and said, "I want you to build a temple so that the Arabs may make pilgrimage to it instead of the Ka`bah."

The ministers bowed and said, "We hear and obey!"

Then Abrahah looked at the senior engineer waiting for his decision. The senior engineer said, "O my master, we are ready to build a temple larger and greater than the Ka`bah but the main problem is that Arabs do not make pilgrimage to the Ka`bah because it is a great building."

Abrahah stood up and asked, "So why do they make pilgrimage to the Ka`bah?"

The senior engineer responded, "The Ka`bah is an ancient building in the desert ... The desert is distinguished from other places created by Allah by being clear and bare in the full sense of the word. It washes away from the human heart all confusions and illusions that lead to false thinking. It is by this bareness that man can be set free from himself and surrender to the Omnipresent, Whom we cannot see. He is the Farthest, however, He is the Nearest at the same time."

Abrahah was furious and said, "I do not understand you O engineer. Why do they make pilgrimage to the Ka`bah?"

The senior engineer said, "O my master! The Ka`bah is the simplest construction in the world ... It is no more than a cube-shaped building of stones. He who built the Ka`bah knew that no architect could reach through his art, the Divine Idea concerning this Sacred House. So, he was satisfied with the simplest form that could be imagined by the human mind ... a cube of stones. This simple cube is a symbol of man's weakness and lowliness in front of Allah. It is a symbol of monotheism."

Abrahah shouted, "O engineer! You did not answer my question. Why do they make pilgrimage to the Ka`bah?"

In complete calmness the engineer replied, "It is a symbol my master ... they believe that it is a symbol of Allah's House."

Abrahah said maliciously and cunningly, "They believe ... who believe? Do you believe in their beliefs?"

The senior engineer was thrown into confusion and said, "It is not a problem of believing or disbelieving, but rather it is a problem of engineering. A constructed building should identify something, say something or refer to something. But the Ka`bah

is the only building that symbolizes the Absolute that does not resemble anything and nothing resembles Him. Now, I want to ask you my master, what do you want us to convey by constructing the new temple you have intended to replace the Ka`bah with? You see my master, it is a purely technical question, and this question requires an answer that will help us to give a definite form to your temple which is to be constructed."

No sooner had the engineer finished his words than something strange occurred.

Abrahah got up from his throne and said in a rage, "Treachery in the castle! Your words involve treachery. Arrest the senior engineer!"

The guards arrested the senior engineer who was completely taken by surprise. Nevertheless, from his pale face there beamed a kind of sublimity.

Abrahah went on to say, "Your words revealed your true character. You believe in the God of the Ka`bah, you do not want to construct a temple to replace the Ka`bah ... Confess."

The senior engineer tried to reply but after opening his mouth and thinking for a few moments, he realized that no one would understand him and so he remained silent.

Abrahah shouted at the senior engineer, "Confess ... Confess that you do not believe in our gods!"

The engineer said, "O my master ... I believe in the technical unity that exists in the universe and so I believe in one God. I confess to having done so."

Abrahah said, "It is treachery ... What is the cause behind it?"

The engineer said, "The advanced level I have reached in the science of engineering."

Abrahah said, "During the first days of your stay in jail you will forget all you know about engineering. Imprison him with the elephant and starve the elephant out and then let the elephant kill him."

And so, the engineer came to me.

Suddenly, the door of my room was opened and a man was thrown under my feet. I moved around in the room because of the sudden arrival but I did not touch the senior engineer. I did not understand why they had thrown him to me. The engineer looked at me while his face was completely pale. He said, "In the name of Allah the Creator of animals and monsters."

I did not like his description of me as a monster. I raised my trunk and I was about to let it fall on his head and tear his bones to shreds, but instead of doing so, I found myself putting my trunk on the engineer so kindly. I suddenly fell in love with him. I do not know why or how. Unlimited peace descended unexpectedly in my heart towards the man. I looked at his eyes and remembered my father's eyes when he was kindly putting his trunk upon my head and moved it to the left and to the right.

The engineer was so surprised at what I was doing. He put his hands on my trunk as if he was protecting himself. Then something else strange happened ... I raised my trunk, put it under the man's body like a pillow, and lifted him up putting him upon my back. It was the first time I had put a human being on my back. My back was an inviolable place for all human

beings. It is a sovereign part for all elephants. No noble elephant who respects himself would allow a human being to ride him, but, for the first time I discovered that there is something called love that has its irresistible laws. I loved that man as I loved my father. I remembered my father's death and my heart was filled with kindness. And so the engineer was on my back and I went on strolling around the room.

Abrahah was shocked when he saw this scene. He shouted, "This engineer is a magician ... he has put a spell on the elephant."

I laughed. We, elephants, laughed by moving our ears and raising our tails. We do the same movements in case of attacking or when we are angry. So, look how laughter and anger are expressed in the same way in the world of elephants!

When Abrahah saw the senior engineer upon my back, he became crazy. They took the engineer and went away. I was punished by starvation and lashes because of my surrendering to the magic of the engineer. I did not understand why they threw him to me or why they were beating me with whips because I had carried him. The minds of the elephants are not as big as their bodies. If our minds were as big as our bodies, we would master the earth and we would have a bone to pick with man.

After two days, I knew that the senior engineer was in jail as a preliminary step toward tormenting and killing him. The junior engineer, who succeeded the senior engineer, began to build a temple for Abrahah to take the place of the Ka`bah with the intention that people would go on a pilgrimage to it.

The junior engineer was a practical, realistic and open-minded man. When Abrahah discussed the matter with him, the junior engineer said, "O my master, we are your slaves and we obey ... What do you want? Your majesty wants to build a temple that people will make pilgrimage to by the Arabs ...We are all at your service. We will build you an unparalleled temple ... the costs of the construction may be too much but I know that gold streams from the extremities of your majesty. All we are eager for is your satisfaction and this is the real gold."

When the junior engineer finished his words, the king was extremely delighted and his facial expressions were filled with false light that covered gloomy foolishness. The construction of the new temple began immediately. Abrahah gave generously to it without reluctance. The junior engineer, who became the senior engineer, supervised the process of construction. He had a small box which he used to send to Abrahah to fill with gold whenever it became empty. It seemed that this engineer was very practical and open-minded so he bestowed liberally upon those who were around him. For this reason, they kept their eyes closed and did not pay attention to what he himself stole of that gold.

The building began to rise while the box of gold was still making its journey from the king's palace to the engineer's hands till it became worn out because of over use. Then the construction reached its completion. The temple was built of stones inlaid with silver. Its niches were made of scented sandalwood. Moreover, the temple's doors were made of red hazel gold. After that, Abrahah waited for people to make pilgrimage to his temple. Abrahah waited for a long time, but did not receive any pilgrims.

The temple had gatekeepers as well as priests. They used to perfume the temple with the most expensive incense. The marvelous scent of sandalwood when mixed with the fragrance of the incense made a fabulous atmosphere ... it was carried by the air into my room. I, the elephant, felt that I had gone back to my childhood in the forest. There is a marvelous scent in the forest at dawn time. The falling rain washes trees throughout the night and so the trees acquire a special scent after being washed by the rain and dried by the moonbeams or the first light of day.

I used to remember my childhood in the forest and the kindness of my father and mother. Such memories awakened in me a kind of kindness and concern at the same time. My old memories gave all credit to my freedom. Recalling such memories made me fully aware of the death of freedom in my life. Such a feeling streamed like a river of sadness in my heart and the sorrows of an elephant equal his weight or even more. My sorrows were as heavy as my weight, but it was not me alone who sank in the sea of sadness. Abrahah was also filled with sadness as many years passed after the construction of the temple and none of the Arabs made pilgrimage to it.

Abrahah's sadness began to take the form of anger. Moreover, there occurred an accident that added fuel to the flames that were already burning. Once a Bedouin entered the temple. He was unknown to all people but no sooner had he entered the temple, than the news reached Abrahah. Then the Bedouin left the temple. To their great surprise, the priests discovered that this Bedouin had relieved himself inside the temple. No one knew if that act was intentional and meant to despise Abrahah or whether it was unprompted and only out of

pressing necessity and the Bedouin's absence from his own homeland. No one could know the real intentions of this unknown visitor. When the news was broken, Abrahah who was in blind fury considered what had happened as a kind of contempt towards him. Abrahah kept threatening and menacing for two days and then he issued his most dangerous decision.

He said, "I am going to destroy the Ka'bah so that the Arabs will have no choice but to make pilgrimage to my temple."

Then the trumpets of war were blown. I began to prepare myself for war. I was happier than words can describe. It is difficult for an elephant like me to heave his heart to his tongue so as to express himself. If it is difficult for men of letters to give expression to their feelings, so what can you expect from elephants? In a word, I was completely happy as if I had my freedom restored. I constituted the armored force that was responsible for the attack of Abrahah's army. Everything depended on me or let us say, with contemplate humility, that nothing could be fulfilled without my attack and breaking through the forces of the army. During wartime, my food and drink increased two fold than what I used to eat and drink during the time of peace. Moreover, I bathe four times a day during the war while I am only allowed to bathe just two times a day during the time of peace. Nevertheless, this was not the only reason behind my happiness.

I confess, as an animal, that eating to my limit drives me forward to perfect happiness and a kind of marvelous numbness. Such a state is not confined to me alone, but rather every animal species is pleased with food, depressed because of hunger and hit by craziness on account of starvation.

Nevertheless, I was completely happy because of something else ... I got a lot of freedom in wartime as in no other time. In fine, for us war is a feast. They took me out of the depressed elephant's house in which I lived and brought the other elephants. I was their supreme leader. Then we began our training on wrecking a stone building that resembled the Ka`bah as said by the engineers.

They put iron chains around the building and tied the end to the bodies of the three elephants. Then they started to whip the elephants to make them destroy the building ... But the elephant failed to do this.

Then, came my turn ...

I was alone. They tied the iron chain well around my body and I started to draw. In the beginning I pulled one time and found that the building was still immovable in its place ... but then I tried again. They lashed me so I looked at them and stopped pulling while wagging my trunk in fury. They fled. My trunk split and broke the air and my anger frightened them so they went away. I recollected all my huge animal power and called all the crazy rage that found its way to me through their insults to me. Then I burst forth like a storm pulling the chain and severing its links that stretched out, and led to the destruction of the building. The leaders of the army hailed and were filled with happiness. Thereupon, they lit their torches and poured out mellowed wine.

The supreme leader of the army went to Abrahah and bowed before him and said, "O my master, the great elephant has succeeded in fulfilling his task. The army is at your command."

Abrahah said. "Tomorrow we are going to move towards our real target ... the Ka`bah."

During my journey towards the land of the Arabs, I was given the chance to get closer to Abrahah and to study his character well. Moreover as a soldier in the army I thought over the aim for which we went out to fight. I think that Abrahah was a mighty tyrant as well as a foolish despot. For sure, when tyranny and foolishness are combined together, they lead to the end of their holder.

That is why I imagined at that time, that Abrahah's going out to war would be his last. I do not know the reason behind that feeling ... but the aim for which we went out to fight, was beyond my realization as an animal. I was not involved in the struggle between Abrahah and what was left to him of a sound mind. I was not inside his head where craziness held the upper hand over sanity and outweighed the idea of destroying the Ka`bah. Moreover, until that moment, I was oblivious to the essence and importance of the Ka`bah. All I knew at that time was that Abrahah wanted to destroy it and when the absolute ruler wanted something, he leads his nation behind him like sheep towards destruction. All this just because he, the ruler, wanted something. Allah knows that I am innocent.

I swear by Allah that I am not guilty ... I raise up my trunk and cry out in grief that I am innocent. I had never canvassed the idea of destroying the Ka`bah and my information, as an animal, is not enough to make me aware of the sacredness of the Ka`bah.

Allah knows that I am innocent ... But I want to announce my innocence before animal history as well as the human one. I

am an elephant who was forced to wreck and destroy something that he was oblivious of regarding its nature and importance.

I will not start my story from the end, but I want to assert my innocence in the eyes of the whole universe before telling about the horror that took place.

For a start, it was a nice journey. It was springtime and the army was extremely strong. We faced no resistance, for at that time of history, Abrahah's army was really the strongest one.

Some Yemeni and Arab armies, who took offence of Abrahah's attempt to destroy the Ka`bah, blocked our way but these armies simply wasted away before our force just like the dissolving of the leaves of the tree in the belly of an elephant. A Yemeni nobleman called Dhu-nafr was captured when he and his army got in Abrahah's way. Nufayl ibn Habib al-Khath`amiy was also arrested when he interrupted the course of Abrahah's army. In this way, we exterminated all the armies that stood in our way to Makkah ... this is the name of the city we were heading towards.

Again and again I would like to announce my innocence, for I knew nothing about the real nature of Makkah. I want this matter to be utterly clear, as it will provide an explanation for my later behavior.

At last Makkah came into sight ...

We stood by its gates. Then Abrahah sent his messenger to ask for the leader of Makkah and to inform him that the king did not come to fight the people of Makkah but to destroy the Ka`bah. If they did not obstruct him, Abrahah would not fight them. So if the leader of Makkah did not want war, he should

come to meet the king. `Abd al-Muttalib, the leader of Makkah, was informed of this message and then he said to Abrahah's messenger, "By Allah we do not want to fight against him nor do we have the ability to do so. This is Allah's sacred House that was built by His friend Ibrahim and his son Isma`il (peace be upon them). If Allah defends the Ka`bah, it is because it is His House but if He does not do so, by Allah we have nothing to protect the Ka`bah with."

Then the messenger and `Abd al-Muttalib headed to Abrahah.

`Abd al-Muttalib was a handsome, dignified man. When Abrahah saw him, he respected and venerated him to the extent that he disliked making him sit in a lower place. At the same time he did not want to let himself be seen by his people sitting with `Abd al-Muttalib at his throne. So, he left his throne and sat with `Abd al-Muttalib on Abrahah's precious carpet. Abrahah said to his interpreter, "Ask him what he wants."

`Abd al-Muttalib said, "I want the king to give me back my hundred camels that were stolen by the army."

Abrahah said to his interpreter, "Tell him, 'When I saw you, I liked you but now you have talked, you have aroused my dislike for you. You are talking to me about the two hundred camels I stole and you do not care about the House that stands for the religion of your forefathers and which I have come to destroy!'"

`Abd al-Muttalib said," I am the lord of these camels but the Sacred House has a Lord Who can, for sure, protect it."

Abrahah said," Not against me."

`Abd al-Muttalib replied, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

Then, Abrahah commanded his servants to give the camels back to `Abd al-Muttalib and to let him go after that.

`Abd al-Muttalib returned and said to his people, "Leave Makkah ... for I have seen an irresistible army. Go to the mountains and pray to Allah to protect His House."

`Abd al-Muttalib said so and then burst into tears. He rushed towards the door of the Ka`bah and took hold of its handle along with a group of believers from Quraysh. They went on praying to Allah and asking Him for His Help.

While he was taking hold of the handle of the House's door and shivering `Abd al-Muttalib said, "O my Lord, the slave defends his possession, I pray to You to protect Your Possessions."

All the people went away from the Ka`bah and Makkah was empty. Abrahah stood in front of his mighty army facing Makkah and said, "Tomorrow we are going to attack."

Then the ill-fated morning arrived.

The trumpets of war were blown. The army began to move ... the army would take the initiative and then would come my task. The army would cordon Makkah so as to avoid any unexpected attack from its people. After that, there came my role to burst forth like a tornado and enter Makkah to fulfill my task of destroying the Ka`bah.

This was the supposed plan, but to all my surprise I could not move when they ordered me to attack. In the beginning, the ambiguous meaning of my father's advice became clear to me. My father said, "You will face a moment at which you have to choose. But you have to choose righteousness." All of a sudden, I realized that I was participating in an unrighteous war

according to the cosmic standard. This is the only standard, to its intuition all animals and plants surrender.

Fear made me shiver and sweat. My bones were trembling from an unknown horror that concealed its terrible fright ... I knelt down. I was ordered to attack but I fell on my knees. I was held back by something I cannot express. Suddenly, I found it beside me. There was a whispering sound that commanded me, "Do not move from your place except to escape ... You are imprisoned in this place."

I trembled again with fear and cold. I said to the commanding sound, "O my noble angel, I am innocent of everything ... I will escape when you permit me."

They heaped lashes upon my body to impel me to get up ... I was in pain but I was watching my pains as if I was watching a movie in which an elephant was being tormented.

Everything was running and getting away from me ... the terror that lurked inside me at that time was enough to make me forget whatever pain I might be suffering. I said to the commanding sound, "I am innocent, I have no relations with what happened ... I will not move from this place. I am kneeling down and so I will be."

Abrahah shouted, "What is going on? Why does the elephant not proceed?"

His leaders replied, "The big elephant knelt down suddenly and refused to get up or to move."

Abrahah shouted angrily, "Compel him to get up and to attack ... Beat him till he gets up."

I heard Abrahah as I hear a video recording of nonsense. The lashes followed incessantly upon my body and the swords went on plunging into my head to make me get up but I dug my heels in and transcended this worldly life by entering a cosmic prayer in which I was talking to the Creator of the universe and the angels.

I said to Him, "O my Lord I am innocent ... I am not involved in what is going on. I have been commanded to stay here ... and so I have been doing so. O my Lord! Help me to escape."

Suddenly, the sky turned black. I raised my head and looked. The sun's disk was concealed by an unlimited number of flocks of birds. At the same time, I witnessed the arrival of the angels of torment.

I got up and fled towards the desert.

I had to flee from that place immediately.

The Army of Elephants and the Flocks of Birds

﴾*And He sent against them birds, in flocks. Striking them with stones of Sijjil (baked clay). And made them like an empty field of stalks (of which the corn has been eaten up by cattle).*﴿

(Al-Fil: 3-5)

While meekness is a characteristic of most visual creatures in the universe, then the frightful horror constitutes a characteristic of their unknown counterparts. I will not say anything else ... I am not allowed to talk about myself.

My reality encloses a secret which if it is revealed to any creature, his blood will freeze and he will cease to exist out of fright.

I am one of the "Flocks of Birds," that was mentioned in the Qur'an. I am the Commander of Communications among the six wings of the Eighth Army of these birds. The number of armies is a secret as well as the number of birds in the Eighth Army.

We launch wars only at the order of Almighty Allah. I will not say how many missions we have carried out, for this matter belongs only to Almighty Allah.

"Every day He has a matter to bring forth (such as giving honor to some, disgrace to some, life to some, death to some, etc.)!"

All what I can say is that those missions were known to the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds. As for us creatures, there are cascading curtains and thick barriers that separate between them and us and this is because of Allah's mercy to His servants.

Allah has mentioned two of these missions in His last Book (The Ever-Glorious Qur'an) to mortals. The first mission was to strike the cities of Prophet Lut (peace be upon him). Almighty Allah says, *"So when Our Commandment came, We turned (the towns of Sodom in Palestine) upside down, and rained on them stones of baked clay, piled up. Marked from your Lord, and they are not ever far from the Zalimun (polytheists, evil-doers, etc.)."*

During this mission we were not mentioned by name in the context of the verses.

The second mission in which Almighty Allah has mentioned us in by name was the strike on the Owners of the Elephant ... The Exalted says, *"Have you (O Muhammad (Peace be upon him)) not seen how your Lord dealt with the Owners of the Elephant? [The elephant army which came from Yemen under the command of Abrahah Al-Ashram intending to destroy the Ka'bah at Makkah]. Did He not make their plot go astray? And sent against them birds, in flocks. Striking them with stones of Sijjil (baked clay). And made them like an empty field of stalks (of which the corn has been eaten up by cattle)."*

I was the first one to receive the order. I screamed out and so the army gathered around. My scream made the farthest star tremble and its atoms shook out of evil omen, and the blood

froze in the mountains' veins and its summits became adorned with deathly white snow. And a wave of mysterious terror vibrated through the atmosphere of the earth.

One second after my scream, the whole Eighth Army gathered upon the branches of fear, the trees of terror and the desolateness of destruction and emptiness.

The Commander of the birds asked, "Who has summoned us forth from the depths of Hell?"

I said, "This is Allah's Will."

The birds prostrated in terror ... while they themselves are originally the source of absolute terror.

The Commander said, "What is our mission?"

I said, "To strike an army heading towards the Ka`bah with the intention to destroy it."

The birds bowed their beaks and dipped them in Hell-fire ... they delved into it with their beaks and brought out stones of Sijjil. At the same time pictures were taken of the attacking army that helped us make a quick estimation of the forces required to destroy our enemy. And, each one of the "Flights of Birds" was bestowed with a power enough to destroy Abraha's army. We organized our formations and plans in Hell-fire and headed silently towards the enemy.

Abraha's army depended mainly on infantry, made up of cavaliers and armors ... the elephants were the armors. Abrahas' army lacked an air force. This was where we had the upper hand over his army.

We were on the way to bomb him from the air.

The artillery had not been discovered until at that time ... but we knew that the artillery would not affect us. We were on our way to strike him with stones of Sijjil.

In these stones lies an incredible secret. My revealing a part of it will only make its mystery even deeper. It would be centuries after our strike on Abraha that humans would discover the energy latent in the nucleus. They will invent bombs made of nuclear energy. These bombs will have a destructive power not present in unpossessed by traditional weapons. This nuclear energy in comparison to the stones of Sijjil is as innocent as children's toys. This is all I can say concerning the destructive power that was used against Abraha's army. These are the limits that I can reveal. I do not want to elaborate more.

We were tremendous in number when we attacked Abraha's army. I was the first to see the armors of this evil army. There was a gigantic elephant at the head of the army and behind him were many elephants. I caught a glimpse of his trembling frame despite of my height. I knew that he was trembling because of the vibrations of the air. The elephant was sitting, and then he suddenly got up and ran towards the desert in an attempt to save himself. I threw the first stone from Hell amidst the army ... Abraha's army blew up. The explosion was confined to a certain area. The destructive power was not allowed to explode in its natural way in the surrounding areas nor was it allowed to make a loud noise.

The explosion was silent and was confined to the enemy's army. The explosion was controlled, not free. For, if it was allowed free reign, it would have completely destroyed the

Ka`bah and all the surrounding areas and it would be impossible to save them after that.

The explosion was silent. Its sound died of fear before it had even been born. And, the rest of the "Flocks of Birds" dropped the stones that they were carrying in their beaks. Later, historians will write that Abraha had retreated and his flesh was falling off piece after piece along the way.

However, this description is not accurate, because the truth is that Abraha's army turned into an empty field of stalks of which the corn had been eaten up by cattle. They turned to be like the dung of animals. And finally the wind swept away what was left of Abraha's army.

The Spider of the Cave

﴾*If you help him (Muhammad) not (it does not matter), for Allah did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two, when they (Muhammad and Abu Bakr) were in the cave, and he (peace be upon him) said to his companion Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him), 'Be not sad (or afraid), surely Allah is with us.' Then Allah sent down His Sakinah (calmness, tranquility, peace, etc.) upon him, and strengthened him with forces (angels) which you saw not, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowermost, while it was the Word of Allah that became the uppermost, and Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.*﴿

(At-Tawbah: 40)

I am a spider who is higher in rank than other spiders. With all humility, if all the spiders in this world were put in one hand and I was put in the other I would outweigh them in superiority. I am not one to make false claims and show-off, I am simply stating facts. I do not think that I need to introduce myself to the reader, for I am sure you understand that I am the spider of the cave that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) hid in. I am the one, who was responsible for the Prophet's deliverance. I am the one, who Allah sent to protect him.

My web is very flimsy and light and the slightest breeze can blow it away. However, despite the weakness of my web, I managed to ward off the iron swords of the atheists that went out in pursuit of the Prophet, and moreover, I was able to defeat them! The outcome of the conflict between the spiders' weak silk and the iron of the swords was the defeat of iron. My house is considered a parable of weakness, *"Verily, the frailest (weakest) of houses is the spider's house."* I sat in my house protecting the noble house of Islam and guarding the Prophet of Allah, Muhammad ibn `Abdullah (peace be upon him).

That was not all that happened to me. Something even more wonderful happened; I saw the Prophet. I know that after the Prophet's death, millions will visit his grave to cry and pray. Moreover, each one of those who cry and pray will imagine the picture of the Messenger of Allah in his mind. But I saw him. I lived with him for three days. He lived as a guest under my cobweb for three whole days. Ah! My heart spins when I remember these days. They were magnificent. Before I saw him, I only loved spiders, food and life, but after I saw him I could only bring myself to love the truth. I changed after I saw him. Have you ever seen a spider cry before? I did. I, the spider, cried when he (peace be upon him) intended to leave the cave ... He left the cave and headed towards the city.

I said to him, "O Messenger of Allah I will miss you ..."

He (peace be upon him) did not hear me.

I said to him again, "O Messenger of Allah! Give me your hand to kiss or let me kiss the tail of your coat." He did not hear me and left. As he was leaving the cave, he was compelled to

destroy the house that I had built for him. I did not understand why he did that ... I sometimes say that he had to destroy my house in order to get out. My house was the cave's door, and the door had to be opened. So the Prophet extended his hand towards my home and gently pushed aside my silken web. I tried to get close to him and kiss his hand ... He did not notice that I wanted to kiss his hand for he pulled back his hand before I could bow down and kiss it.

He left ...

I bowed over the torn silk that had been my house and said, "The silk touched the hand of Allah's Messenger before I did." Then I cried. I continued to cry until my house dissolved in my tears and the cave went back to how it had been.

Let me tell my story from the very beginning. I ask the reader to forgive me for I am not myself.

I was a mountain spider and mountain spiders are extremely unlucky. We feed mainly on flies and insects. I was born in a deserted cave in mount Thawr. It is a mountain in Makkah, a small city that I have never seen in my life. Sometimes we hear the doves glorifying Allah from which we understand that they live under the protection of the Sacred House of Allah in Makkah. I tried to imagine how Makkah or the Sacred House of Allah would look but I could not, for I was imprisoned in the cave of Thawr. It is a desolate cave during the day and scary during the night. The cave is in the direction of Yemen. Nobody visits us. Even the beasts flee from the desolation of the mountains and prefer more habitable places.

In brief, I am the mistress of this mountain and its queen.

One day I was dangling by a silken string, which I had made from the cave's ceiling. It was a very hot day so I was swinging myself to and fro. Then I heard an unearthly voice ask, "Who of Allah's creatures inhabits this cave?"

Spiritual boundaries were broken and I realized that I was hearing the voice of an angel. I stopped swinging, bowed my whole body and prostrated in greeting.

I answered the angelic voice saying, "The spider of this cave Meme the daughter of Muma the granddaughter of Mamu is honored to speak with you."

The angelic voice said, "Come out to the door of the cave."

I moved the silken string to the door of the cave and came out.

The voice said, "After awhile, two of Allah's men will come to this cave ... Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companion in this life and the Hereafter, Abu Bakr."

I asked, "And who is Muhammad (peace be upon him)?"

The voice replied, "He is the last of the Prophets of Allah on the earth, the mercy of Allah that He sent to the worlds. You will be the servant of him and his companion for three days in the cave."

I was filled with wonder and delight and my surprise increased with every passing minute. I said, "What brings him here to this desolate cave?"

The voice again replied, "He has fled his home for the sake of Allah's religion and the atheist tribes want his blood. How

much time do you need in order to build your house over the door of the cave?"

As I was measuring angles, I said, "Four hours of constant work separated by two periods of rest."

The angelic voice ordered, "Work without resting ... Allah has charged you with the responsibility to safeguard His Prophet ... Divine Protection has put the seal on the fate of the final Message and the future of an entire civilization in your trust."

I deepened my prostration and whispered, "I hear and obey!"

The head angel left, and in an atmosphere of silence and desolation, I started working.

I examined my seven glands that make silk and they were full. I closely examined the entrance of the cave. The door was wide and I started measuring the angles and quickly calculated from which angle I should begin. "I will need six solid pillars of silk to produce from them twenty-six strings that will act as supplementary pillars. Also, I will need ninety-five strings in order to support the walls," I thought.

After that, I started to make the silk, which looks so flimsy, but which is stronger than anything solid as it turns into a fine string that is one thousandth of an inch in diameter. That is the diameter of the string within my web.

People do not know that spiders can measure angles and divide them, and that they can assess the durability of materials and the average of pressure. Moreover, they can calculate thousands of complicated architectural problems that people face in the building process. People do not know that spiders

weave many kinds of silk to fulfill their all needs. We use our webs to trap a prey, as a dining table, a bed, a sheet, an alarm system, a getaway, a means of transportation and as a shield for protection. In other words, we spiders produce the most useful of material that can be used for many purposes.

The silk that a spider's gland secretes is undoubtedly like the silk produced by a caterpillar but there are some differences. It is these differences that make the spider's weave better, for it is finer, softer and more solid than any other silk. I was surprised to find the Messenger entering the cave with Abu Bakr. I stopped working for a moment and looked at his noble and majestic face that looks like a sheet of gold and felt a deep sense of reverence.

After that I said, "Welcome O Messenger of Allah."

I had hardly finished my greeting to him when I began weaving my house over the door of the cave. I descended vertically from the cave's opening to its floor while weaving my silk. Then I pulled it and fixed it to the ground with an acidic substance that my gland secretes. After that, I climbed up quickly to the entrance of the cave and started to go up and down leaning to the right and to the left while I was weaving my house. The weaving took three hours, six minutes and twenty seconds.

The atheists came to the entrance of the cave with their shiny swords standing face to face with my spidery web.

One of the atheists said, "If he had entered here then this spider's web would not be over the door."

I smiled a wide smile inside my house and Abu Bakr said to the Prophet (in a low voice), "If one of them were to look under his feet he would find us."

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, *"Have no fear for Allah is with us."*

The Messenger had hardly spoken these words when the place suddenly became full of angels, and it was filled with a voice saying, *"If you help him (Muhammad) not (it does not matter), for Allah did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two, when they (Muhammad and Abu Bakr) were in the cave, and he (peace be upon him) said to his companion Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him), "Be not sad (or afraid), surely Allah is with us." Then Allah sent down His Sakinah (calmness, tranquility, peace, etc.) upon him, and strengthened him with forces (angels) which you saw not, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowermost, while it was the Word of Allah that became the uppermost, and Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise."*

After the voice had subsided, once again the cave became full of angels. I was surprised to find angels standing in front of my spidery house and standing behind it.

I asked the one closest to me, "What has happened?"

He replied, "We have come by an Order from Allah to protect His noble Prophet."

I was screaming and I said, "But I am commissioned to protect him and guard him! Why are you breaking my heart? No one can transgress against him! He is my guest and I am his servant."

I cried because I was so emotionally worked up and I was surprised to discover that I could cry. I turned towards the Prophet wanting to complain to him. But I found him preoccupied with prayer. He was praying and his companion, Abu Bakr, was praying behind him. When they prostrated, I prostrated with them.

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It is proved scientifically that the animal has a language in spite of being different is its signification from that of humans. Actually, science has failed to decode it but it has been proven that there is a language for animals that does not resemble ours. This is what proved after several studies that occupied wholly the efforts of scientists and researches.

The Ever-Glorious Qur'an has proved this fact fourteen centuries ago when the animal was thought to be nothing but dirty, mindless and devoid of any logic or language and without any value except that could be got by man. The Ever-Glorious Qur'an with plain language proves that the animals has a special language and a certain way of thinking.

Animals in the Glorious Qur'an, which is a mixture of religious and scientific elements, presents some animals relating their own stories in an outstanding way. These animals were given the chnce to express their own stances and attitudes and to reveal their own secrets and mysteries.

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